THE MER-MAID'S GIFT

by

JULIA BROWN

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MAGINEL WRIGHT ENRIGHT

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THE MERMAID'S GIFT

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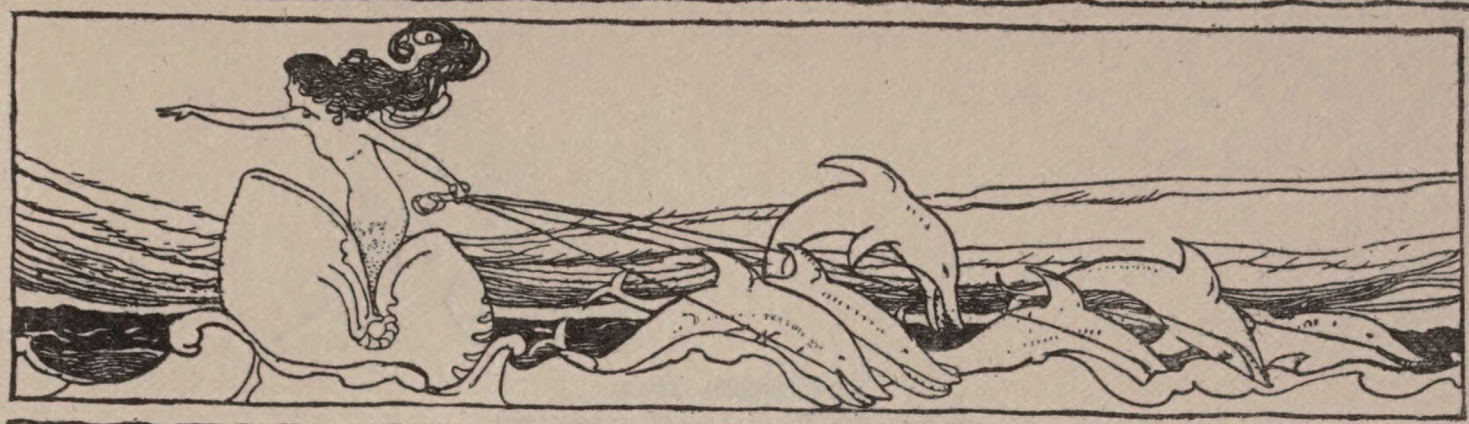
"There was none to see save one lone little sea maid, and the four faithful beasts"



THE MERMAID'S GIFT

AND OTHER STORIES

By JULIA BROWN

Author of "The Enchanted Peacock"

With illustrations by

MAGINEL WRIGHT ENRIGHT

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TO MY NIECE AND NEPHEW

Romaine and Lockwood Hardcastle

TO WHOM THESE STORIES FIRST WERE TOLD

THEY ARE LOVINGLY DEDICATED

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"Often the Prince read to them"

THE MERMAID'S GIFT

THE sun was shining, the breeze was blowing, and the blue sea was sparkling. All the little waves, with their white caps on, were running races, chasing each other far up the sandy beach. Everything seemed gay and happy but one forlorn little mermaid who swam up and down near the shore from which she never took her eyes. Beyond the beach was a beautiful wood through which one could catch glimpses of lovely gardens and fountains, while over the highest tree tops the towers and turrets of a palace appeared, the summer home of the King. It was this wood the mermaid was watching so closely.

Presently she saw two children emerge from beneath the trees and come running down to the seashore, hand in hand. The little mermaid slipped into the shadow of a great rock from where she could see the children without being seen by them.

Ever since she had first spied them, weeks before, she had come daily to watch them, longing to join them but afraid to venture. Now her wistful eyes followed them as they ran to and fro upon the shore.

They were very much alike, brother and sister, without doubt. Both had dark hair, the girl's blowing over her shoulders in long ringlets, the boy's bobbing in short curls above his forehead. Both had rosy cheeks and dark eyes, the girl soft brown ones, the boy great solemn black ones. But the girl's chin was dimpled, her mouth a rosebud, while the boy's chin set square and his mouth was firm and masterful.

They danced, they sang, they built castles in the sand and laughed when the waves washed them away; they ran races, always laughing, and once, when the girl tripped and fell, the boy turned back, picked her up and kissed her, then they both ran laughing on.

The little mermaid watched them with hungry eyes.

"Oh, why am I not as they are?" she cried, and the tears brimmed over and rolled down her cheeks. Since first she had seen these happy

children at play, and every day after, she had wished to be like them. She no longer cared for her playmates in the sea, whose only idea of play was to tumble each other about. Her days were spent near the shore where she hid behind the great rocks when the children played, that she might watch them.

As she now watched and wept, the clear silver notes of a horn sounded from beyond the wood. The children heard them and knew the summons was for them. Without a moment's hesitation they trotted back, hand in hand, toward the palace. The mermaid gazed after them until they disappeared beneath the beech trees, then she came out from her hiding place and dried her eyes. Diving into a little cave she brought up a small mirror in a coral frame and a comb of gold and pearl. Then she sat upon the rocks and combed her long, yellow hair.

What wonderful hair it was, rippling far below her waist in golden waves, while the fresh breeze blew out little strands that curled about her white forehead like grape tendrils. Her eyes were blue as the sapphire sea, and one could look almost as far into their crystal depths; her mouth showed little white teeth between two coral lips, even now

drooping at the corners; and her skin,—have you ever seen a sea shell in pearly tints with a rosy glow underneath? Well, the mermaid's skin was like that, from her fair throat to her charming waist. But alas, below that pretty waist were scales, golden green and glittering, to be sure, but ending in a fishy tail! And that was why the mermaid wept and sighed to be like the little earth children she watched each day.

Presently her fair hair was combed to suit her and she hid her comb and glass in the cave under the rocks and swam slowly to her home.

It was some weeks later, when she went as usual to watch the children play, that they failed to come. She waited for them all the day, straining her eyes to see beyond the trees, if they might perchance be in the garden. But there was no trace of them and the little mermaid had to swim home without seeing them. The next day she went again to the shore, and after waiting a long time she saw one child, alone, come from the wood. Slowly, slowly she walked down to the beach, and as she drew near the mermaid could see that the little earth-maiden was weeping and could hear her sobs. She sat down on the sands close to the rock behind

which the mermaid hid, and cried more bitterly than ever.

"Oh, my brother, my brother," she wailed, "how can I play without you? I am so lonely, so lonely."

The little sea maid peeped out; oh, if she might comfort her! The sobs continued and the child said again:

"Oh, I am so lonely! If I only had some one to play with me!"

The mermaid could bear it no longer; she swam around the rock in front of the weeping child and, clasping her hands together in entreaty, cried:

"Would I do? Oh, lovely maiden, would I do?"

The brown-eyed maid on the shore stopped crying and stared at the blue-eyed maid in the water.

"Where did you come from?" she said, "and who are you?"

"I came from behind the rock," answered the mermaid, "and my name is Marinna."

"Were you in bathing?" asked the other, still puzzled.

"No, I live in the water. I am—" here she hesitated, "I am a mermaid," she said, brokenly.

"Oh, how fine!" cried the child on the shore, "I have always wanted to see a mermaid. Where do you live?"

The little sea maid gave a long, happy sigh; everything was going to be all right after all.

"I live in my father's palace, under the water," she said, "he is the merking."

"Then you are a princess, too!" exclaimed the shore maid. "My father is the King on the land and I am the Princess Erda."

"Yes, I am a merprincess," said Marinna, "and I shall be so glad if I may play with you."

"I shall be glad to have you," said the Princess Erda. "I wish my brother Terrah could have seen you." The brown eyes filled again with tears and the little merprincess drew nearer and asked sympathetically:

"Where is your brother?"

"They have taken him away to a great school for many, many hard lessons," answered Princess Erda. "But he will learn them all," she added, proudly, "he is so very clever, my brother Terrah. He will be a great king some day and he always says he is going to be a good one so the people will be happy. He is always thinking about the people."

"That is good," cried the merprincess, "that is like my father, and all the merpeople love him."

The Princess Erda bent forward and took a long look at the mermaid, then she said:

"I like you. You look good, too. I shall say Marinna and you shall call me Erda, since we both are princesses. Now let us play."

So they played, the two little princesses, building castles on the sand, hunting shells—only the mermaid could find the most beautiful, because they were under the water—and running races. That is, Princess Erda ran on the sand, while the merprincess swam along the edge of the sea. And often she did not swim nearly so fast as she could, that her little playmate might first reach the goal.

Finally, when she grew tired of play, Princess Erda sat down by the great rock and said:

"Tell me what you do in the sea?"

"Oh, I play and study, like you," she answered.

"What do you study? You have no books, have you?" asked Erda.

"Books," said Marinna, with a puzzled frown, "I do not know what they are. But I learn about the fishes, the great ones and the little ones, my father rules them all. It is true I do not have to

study so much as my brother Maren, but he will be merking, some day."

"Have you a brother, also?" exclaimed the Princess Erda. "I should like to see him."

"He is away, now. Like your brother, he has to learn to be a king. He has a wonderful teacher; the merpeople say he has learned his wisdom from the Great White Whale, himself."

"The Great White Whale?" repeated the Princess Erda in astonishment, "what is that?"

"Oh, he is the wisest creature in all the seas," cried the mermaid, earnestly. "He is so very, very old, he is blind, but he is so wondrous wise that when one *must* know a thing, and no one else can tell, one goes to the Great White Whale to find it out."

"Did you ever go?" asked the Princess Erda.

"Oh, no, no!" hastily exclaimed Marinna, "I should be afraid, and then my father can tell me all I need to know."

"What else do you do?" then asked the earth princess.

"Oh, I hunt for shells and pearls and coral—I will bring you some—and I sit on the rocks and comb my hair. I used to sing before I saw you.

After that I was too unhappy, because I longed to know you." She smiled admiringly at her new friend.

"Do it now!" cried the Princess Erda, clapping her hands, "sit on the rock and comb your hair and sing. I should love to have you."

The merprincess dived for her comb and hand glass; then she obediently perched herself on the rocks and began to comb her hair and sing. And oh, such a sweet voice as it was that floated out over the sea. The song of the waves was in it; the cries of the sea birds echoed in its plaintive tones.

The Princess Erda was enchanted. When the merprincess paused she begged her to sing again, and both children felt their hearts drawn together by the melody.

Presently the mermaid stopped and said, laughing:

"There, I have sung enough, and my hair has never had such a combing."

"Such lovely silken hair," sighed Princess Erda, "it deserves so wonderful a comb and glass."

"These!" cried Marinna, astonished, "why these are the least beautiful of the many I have. Would

you—" she hesitated, "would you have them? They are scarcely fine enough for you, but if you like them I should be so very happy if you would let me give them to you."

The little earth princess put out her hands, saying simply:

"I thank you for them. I am happy to take them from you, for you are now my friend."

Before the other could reply, the notes of the silver horn sounded through the trees. Princess Erda cried:

"It is for me, I must go! Be sure to come again to-morrow," and off toward the palace she scampered, while the mermaid called after her:

"I will. Good-by, good-by."

She watched her out of sight, then smiling most happily, swam home to tell what a friend she had made.

And for many wonderful, joyous days the two little maids, one of the sea, one of the land, met on the edge of the shore. Many games they played, many things learned they of each other as they sat and talked. But by and by, the breezes grew chill and one day when they met, Princess Erda said, sadly:

"Dear friend, we go away very soon, and I shall have to say good-by to you."

"Where do you go?" asked the mermaid.

"To the great city which is the capital of my father's kingdom, where is our winter home."

"I, too, go away," said Marinna. "Even now the merpeople are preparing for our long journey to the Southern Seas. I am glad you are going as well, for I thought you would be here, and perhaps be lonely without me."

"I should be, indeed, were I here. And although I shall have my dear brother Terrah with me soon, I shall miss you sadly. But we will talk of you. I shall tell him how you look and how we have played and talked together and he will love you as I do. Tell me where and how you go for the winter."

"My father, my brother and I, with the Court, go in our sea shells, drawn by dolphins, that I have told you of," answered the merprincess, "the Tritons and other merpeople swimming about us."

"When shall you come back?" asked Princess Erda.

"My father knows by the sun," said the mermaid. "When it has started north he sends two of

his faithful Tritons back here. If the water is warm and the breeze soft, they send him word by the flying fish and we all come back as we went.

"Oh, your life is so interesting," breathed the Princess Erda. "We, my brother Terrah and I, shall not do much but study. But we shall watch for the spring and I hope when we come back you will be here, waiting for us."

So the little maids kissed each other and parted.

The sun was shining, the breeze was blowing, and the blue sea was sparkling. All the little waves, with their white caps on, were running races, chasing each other far up the sandy beach. Everything seemed gay and happy, for spring had come again and one little mermaid was swimming up and down near the shore, watching eagerly the beech wood beyond. Presently she saw two children emerge from beneath the trees and come running down to the sea, hand in hand.

"Marinna, Marinna," called the girl's clear voice, "have you come yet?"

The little merprincess swam close to the rocks and answered, happily:

"I am here, dearest Erda, I am just come."

They kissed each other and both blue and brown eyes sparkled with joy over the meeting.

"This is my brother Terrah," said the earth princess, with pride. "He has heard all about you and he has thought of many new games we can play together."

The little merprincess put out her hand and looked rather shyly from under her long lashes at the newcomer. But the boy's frank smile and pleasant greeting assured her she had made another friend.

"I have brought you a ring, dear Marinna," said Princess Erda. "It is a sapphire just the color of your eyes," and she slipped it on the finger of the mermaid.

"It is most beautiful," cried she, "and I thank you greatly. I, too, have brought you something." Here she unclasped from her throat a pink coral necklace and hung it about the Princess Erda's neck.

"It is coral, the color of your lips," she said, smiling, as her delighted friend kissed and thanked her.

And happily the three children played together.

"Now, you must comb your hair and sing," decided Erda. So the merprincess dived for her comb and glass and sat upon the rocks, charming

the earth children by the wonderful melody of her voice until the silver horn sounded and they said good-by, promising to meet the next day.

So the next day, and the next, and the next they met. The new games were fascinating and when they tired of them Prince Terrah thought of more. The chill days of autumn came all too soon for the three playmates, when they had to say good-by and go their separate ways. The earth children had their winter of study in the great city, the mermaid hers in Southern Seas, her merpeople around her. When spring brightened the world with her smile, the three friends met again by the rocks on the seashore.

So passed the years, and each one in its flight seemed to strengthen the friendship which bound the three. Now, to be sure, they rarely ran races, and the games were almost forgotten. The Princess Erda had reached to womanhood and Prince Terrah numbered three more years than she. But they sat long hours on the rocks, talking or singing, and often the prince read to them. This was always a delight to the merprincess for, as you can clearly see, she had no books, and the ways of earth people were unknown to her.

One summer day, as the mermaid swam slowly back and forth, waiting for her friends, she saw Prince Terrah come alone from the beech wood.

"Where is Erda?" she called, as he drew near.

"There is visiting us a great prince from the north," he answered, "and Erda and I have him to entertain. I slipped away while they were walking in the garden."

"You and Erda have him to entertain! Why, how old is he?"

"About a year older than I."

"Why does he not come down and sit with us on the rocks?"

"I think he likes best to be alone with my sister," said Prince Terrah, gravely. "I think he is seeking a bride."

"A bride!" cried the mermaid, in astonishment, "then why does he not find some one old enough for him?"

"Erda is now eighteen," said her brother, "and princesses usually marry young."

"Marry!" gasped Marinna. "Will she, do you think, marry and leave us?" and she burst into tears.

"Dear Marinna," said the young man, "it is not a thing to cry for. If they love each other, think

how happy they will be." Here Prince Terrah sighed.

But Marinna refused to be comforted. She would not stay and talk, as the prince begged her to, but swam sorrowfully home.

The next day she came again to see if her dear Erda was waiting for her. But no, only Prince Terrah sat on the rocks.

"Come," he said, masterfully," come and talk to me. Do you not think I too miss her? We will have to comfort each other."

So they sat and talked about the Princess Erda, but the mermaid's heart was still sore for her friend when she said good-by and swam away.

Then one day Erda came alone. Never had Marinna seen her looking more lovely. Her eyes sparkled, there was a soft pink in her cheeks and her little feet could not walk slowly but danced all the way down the beach to the rocks. The foolish little mermaid thought it was joy at seeing her again and smiled happily as she greeted her.

"Oh, Erda, dear Erda," she sighed, "I have so missed you. Come sit on the rocks and tell me the prince has gone.

But Erda drew back, and her fair face clouded.

"Do not say that, Marinna," she cried, "for

when he goes, he takes my heart with him. I have left him with Terrah and my father for a little while but I must go back before he misses me. If you love me, dear Marinna, you must be glad for me because I am so happy."

The poor little merprincess put her hand to her heart while her eyes filled with tears. But she answered bravely:

"I do love you, Erda; I love you so much that I will rejoice in whatever makes you happy."

So she listened to the earth princess as she told of the great Prince from the North; but when presently Erda went back to the palace, it was a very forlorn little mermaid who sat on the rocks with the briny tears dripping down into the salt sea.

Here Prince Terrah found, but failed to comfort her. Yet she could not stay away from that shore where she had been so happy, and the following day found her again at the rocks, hoping the princess might appear. When she saw Prince Terrah coming down alone she was minded to steal away, as there had come a look into his eyes of late, which she did not care to see. But he called to her and she waited until he reached the rocks. His face was very serious as he said:

"I have grave news for you, Marinna. Our Erda is in deep distress."

"Oh, what has occurred," cried the little merprincess, "to distress my dear Erda?"

"Only last night," answered Prince Terrah, "the Prince from the North asked the King for his daughter's hand. And, as he had already won her heart, my good father gave his consent. There was great merrymaking in the palace," he continued, looking wistfully at the merprincess, "but I would rather have been here with you. Why do you try to avoid me of late, dear Marinna?"

But she cried, impatiently:

"Go on; why do you stop there? What was it that distressed my Erda?"

"Early this morning there came a rider in hot haste, the bearer of a message to the prince from his lords and counselors. The great astrologer, the chief of all the wise men and magicians of his kingdom, had read a portent in the stars which the prince would do well to obey. He must not marry until he found a princess who wore in her crown a Spark from the North Star. Otherwise, he would lose his kingdom and his life. At first he refused to obey. Wed my sweet sister he would, caring for

neither life nor kingdom without her. But she would not. His life was too precious to risk, and never should he lose it because of her. So there the matter rests, and there is only trouble and sorrow in the palace where last night there was joy and gladness."

When he ceased speaking the mermaid was silent for a long time, then she said:

"Under the sea, Prince Terrah, many things are understood which the earth people know naught of. I am sure there will be a way out of this trouble. Come here to-morrow; I shall consult my wise father and may then have news for you."

She waited no longer than her last word, but swam rapidly away.

The next day Prince Terrah waited on the rocks, but when he saw the mermaid's grave face he knew she had no good news, yet. She came close to him and said:

"It is more than my father can tell. To-morrow I go to see the teacher under whom my brother Maren studies. He is very wise, he has learned, they say, of the Great White Whale, himself."

"How can you go alone?" cried Prince Terrah. "You will be lost—"

The mermaid drew herself up rather haughtily:

"I go in my shell," she said, "attended by my people, mermaids, mermen, and Tritons. You forget I am the daughter of the great merking who rules the sea."

"I would you were a simple earth maiden," he cried, "for then—"

But then the merprincess interrupted him, saying:

"I shall send you word when I return. Good-by," and she was gone.

For many days Prince Terrah came to the rocks, but there was no sign of Marinna. The Prince from the North had gone, heartbroken, back to his kingdom and Princess Erda sat in the garden and sighed and wept. For Terrah had not told her what the merprincess had said, lest nothing come of it and she be disappointed.

At last, as he sat on the rocks one day, looking out over the ocean, he saw a shining golden head above the waves and his heart beat fast with hope. As it drew nearer he perceived a little mermaid who, alas, was not Marinna. When she reached the rocks she said, timidly to the young man:

"Is this the Prince Terrah?"

"It is," he responded.

"Then I have a message for you which our merprincess Marinna has sent. Even the wise teacher of our merprince Maren cannot tell her what she wishes to know, and she has gone—," the little mermaid lowered her voice and spoke with awe, "she has gone to seek knowledge from the Great White Whale, himself. But she bade me tell you that since he was the wisest creature in all the seas, she would return with the knowledge you desired."

The prince felt by no means sure of this, but he inquired:

"And when will that be?"

"I do not know, oh, Prince," the little mermaid replied, "only that the journey will be long. I am to bring you word as soon as the princess returns," and she swam away.

The days dragged by, oh, so slowly, to Prince Terrah. Sometimes he brought his books to the rocks and tried to read, but his eyes lifted themselves from the printed page too often for him to discern what he read. For his thoughts were with the merprincess and he sighed for her return. His mind went back to the happy days of childhood when they played together on the sands; he could see her deep blue eyes sparkle with glee as they

raced up and down, one in the sea, two on the shore; before his dreaming eyes shone the glitter of her golden hair, the soft rosy pearl of her skin, and her wonderful voice rang in his ears. Oh, if they had never grown up, or if they could but return to that happy childhood. Here was he, a man, some day to be a great king, ruler over vast dominions, and he loved a mermaid! No earth prince could ask even a merprincess to be his queen, then he was almost sure Marinna cared nothing for him, save as a friend. So Prince Terrah's heart was very sad as he sat by the sea, waiting for tidings from the one he loved.

Far, far away, in Eastern Seas, the blue ocean bore upon its waves a wondrous procession of voyagers. First came Tritons, blowing upon conch shells to clear the way for those who followed. After them swam mermen and mermaids, a numerous company, surrounding a huge sea shell, drawn by six swift dolphins. In the shell sat the merprincess Marinna, thus attended and protected by her father's loyal people. Many days had they been on the way and they were now very near their journey's end. They were passing a barren shore where a great point of rocks jutted into the sea. The merprincess

lifted her eyes to the land. No dwelling place of men could be seen, no tree, no green shrub, no blade of grass, only the frowning rocks. She sighed and again felt fearful of what she might meet. But it was for her friend, her Erda, and she would push on until she gained the knowledge which she sought.

An old merman swam near. She inclined her head to him and he spoke:

"Oh, Princess, we are very near the end of your journey. The cave of the Great White Whale lies deep underneath that point of rocks. Will it please you to descend now with me?"

The merprincess shivered slightly, but answered:

"I am ready. Let us go at once," and slipping from her shell, she dived down into the depths of the sea with her companion.

It was so deep, so dark under the shadow of the grim rocks, that once the merprincess said to her attendant:

"You are quite sure it is here, Océ?"

"Quite, my Princess. I have been here more than once with the wise teacher of our Prince Maren." Then he added:

"There is nothing at all to fear, my Princess. Even the Great White Whale himself, owes allegiance

to your august father. Beside this, he is too kind to harm any living creature."

Still they floated downward, through the dusk. Their eyes were becoming used to the faint light, and the merprincess saw they were nearing the bottom of the sea. A huge shape showed through the gloom and the mermaid whispered:

"What is it, Océ?" Her voice trembled a little. "Not a fish, surely."

"No, my Princess," he made answer, quickly, "it is a great ship in which the earth people once sailed the seas, now sunken here, a useless hulk. But we have reached the cave, which you must enter alone."

The little mermaid paused. In front of her she now saw the entrance to a cave, in the very foundations of the earth. Seaweed hung so thickly over it she was forced to push it aside with both small hands ere she could enter. The first sight of the cave itself almost took her breath, it was so beautiful. The walls and roof were of white coral; the sides of the cave were draped with seaweed, strung with rare shells, while starfish and curious sea creatures found a footing on the rocks below. But that which lent most enchantment to the scene was the wonderful blue light which bathed everything in tints of azure.

She looked down at her rosy little fingers, and even they had caught the same hue. As she paused there in the great cave, entranced with its beauty, a queer, husky whisper reached her ears:

"What is it that disturbs my rest?"

The merprincess started violently, but before she could speak, the voice sounded again:

"Why splash about like that? What are you?"

"I am Marinna," faltered the startled mermaid.

"Ah," said the Great White Whale, "that is clear, at any rate. Now perhaps you will be good enough to go away and let me sleep."

Marinna looked at him indignantly. The great white creature lay at the other end of the cave, his huge bulk spread over a soft cushion of seaweed, his blind eyes closed. She was not afraid of him any more. She swam closer to him and said:

"I am the merprincess, Marinna. I am the only daughter of your King, and I have come many leagues to profit by your great wisdom."

"There have been so many merkings since I have laid here, but whosoever reigns now, although I know him not, is my King. What would you, child?"

"I desire to know," said the merprincess, boldly, "how one may gain a Spark from the North Star?"

There was a silence, then the Great White Whale said, sleepily:

"What is a star? I have forgotten."

"Why, it is a light in the sky," answered Marinna.

"What is light?" further questioned the great creature.

"Light? Oh, light is—, why it is—, why I do not know how to tell you," said the little mermaid.

"Have you eyes?" said the Great White Whale.

"Certainly," responded Marinna, with warmth.

"Can you see?"

"Why, of course I can."

"She has eyes," quoth the Great White Whale, "and she can see, yet she cannot tell me what light is. This is simply ignorance."

The mermaid's eyes flashed.

"I know," she said, "what light is, but how can one so ignorant tell anything to one so wise? I think I may as well go back to my home."

"You are so hasty," sighed the whale. "If you can wait until I remember, I shall tell you what you wish to know."

Then a great silence fell upon the cave. The surge of the sea swayed the waiting mermaid gently

to and fro; the blue light glinted through the waves now on this, now on that curious shell, or sea anemone, but by and by Marinna grew tired of watching them. Hours passed by and still the Great White Whale spoke not, and the mermaid could hear a purring sound as his sides heaved gently.

"He has gone to sleep!" she thought with vexation, but she did not quite like to rouse him. Again she waited, amusing herself by counting the starfish to keep her own eyes from closing, so drowsy did she become in the silence and the swaying sea. Presently she said to herself:

"Oh, this is quite hopeless. I shall go home," but as she turned toward the exit from the cave, the voice spoke again, clearer and firmer than at the first:

"I have remembered," it said. "I have remembered those days I swam the Northern Seas; I have remembered what light is; I have remembered the stars, even the great North Star." He paused and the little mermaid said, eagerly:

"And can you tell me now, how one can get a Spark from the North Star?"

"Only once in a thousand years does one fall," answered the Great White Whale, "but if this be the time, I do not know."

"It must be the time," answered the merprincess, stoutly, "since it is so needed. Now tell me how one can secure it."

"You must go to the Edge of the Land," said the whale.

"Is it there?" queried the mermaid.

"Then you must go to the Isle of Rocks."

"Is it there?" she asked again.

"Then you must go to the Land of Ice and Snow."

The little mermaid shivered.

"Is it there?" she asked, faintly.

"It is there you will find it, if at all. Then you must wait until the Long Night comes on. If it be the time, I know not, but if it be, the Spark will fall before the morning comes again." He was still. Marinna waited a long time but only the purring sound broke the silence. Finally she said:

"Is there more?" No answer came. Then she said:

"I thank you with all my heart and my father, the King, will give you great reward."

Still the silence continued, so, believing the great creature really sunk in slumber, she turned to leave. Then the husky whisper, fainter than ever, reached her ears:

"If it be the time, I know not, but if it be, go. I wish for no reward but to be let alone, that I may sleep."

The mermaid swam slowly from the cave and joining the waiting Océ floated to the surface of the sea. Taking her place in her shell, she turned her face homeward.

No one questioned her, but she felt the loving sympathy of her people during the long journey. And deeply, seriously did she think, during that journey. It came to her that she alone could go to seek for the Spark from the North Star. Only love would dare so much for a gift. The wise White Whale had meant this when he said:

"*You* must go."

Yes, she must go, no other could. First, she must see the wise teacher of her brother, he would know if this were the time. Then she would go on to her home and persuade her father, the merking, to let her take the long journey. He loved her, he would let her do this thing she so greatly wished, he would arrange everything for her comfort and safety. So, while her face was still grave, she grew more settled in her mind and more sure of what she should do.

She paid her visit to the teacher of her brother and that wise merman was able to assure her that this was indeed the year in which there fell a Spark from the North Star. Then she went on to her father's sea palace, where there were great rejoicings over her return.

But she found it very, very hard to persuade the merking to allow her to go upon the long and dangerous journey to the Land of Ice and Snow.

"It is unfitting that a princess of the sea undertake such a task," he said.

"It is for a princess of the earth I undertake it, my father. It is a task fitted only for one of high position, and you have always taught us that because we are of royal birth, we should the more be ready to help others."

"You will suffer, my child, from the bitter cold," he pleaded.

"No, dearest father, my love will keep me warm; my purpose will sustain me."

"Could you not be happy to give it up, and remain here with those who love you?" he asked.

"No, my father," she answered firmly, but lovingly, "the Princess Erda loves me and she is very unhappy. No one can help her but me, and

I so love her that unless she is happy, I am not."

So finally, the King gave his consent and preparations were begun for the long journey of the merprincess. The little messenger was dispatched to Prince Terrah, whom she found waiting on the sands.

"You bring me word of your merprincess?" he cried, on seeing her.

"I do," answered the mermaid. "She has returned and bids me say she will meet the Princess Erda and Prince Terrah here by the rocks, to-morrow."

So the morrow found the brother and sister pacing up and down the sands, eagerly watching for the appearance of a familiar golden head upon the waves. At last she came, their friend Marinna, beautiful and gentle as of old, her happiness at seeing them beaming in her eyes.

The two maids embraced each other warmly, and a little hand was held out to Prince Terrah, who could not forbear kissing it.

"Ah, dear Erda," cried the mermaid, "you are too thin and pale. I like it not."

"You are rosy and lovely enough for two, Marinna," said the earth princess. "My thoughts have been too sad, of late, to beautify any one."

"I have come to change all that, Erda," said

her friend, earnestly. "You must begin to think only good thoughts now, thoughts of hope, for," here she turned to Prince Terrah, "I have gained the knowledge I went to seek."

"What is that?" inquired the Princess Erda, for her brother had never told her why the mermaid went away.

"I have been," said Marinna then, "to seek the Great White Whale, himself, to ask him how one could gain a Spark from the North Star."

The Princess Erda drew nearer to her and her pale face flushed.

"Oh, Marinna," she gasped, "can it be done? Could he tell you?"

"He could and did tell me," answered the mermaid. "You will yet be happy, my sweet Erda, you and your prince."

The tears streamed down the face of the earth princess. She caught her friend in her arms, sobbing:

"You went for me, dear Marinna, you braved that great creature for me! How can I ever thank you?"

The sea maid smiled.

"Had I known before I went what a mild creature was the Great White Whale, I should never have feared as I did."

"Now," cried Princess Erda, "you will arrange, Terrah, to have some one sent, at once, for the Spark from the North Star. Where is he to go, Marinna?"

"Wait, Erda," said the mermaid, gravely, "wait until you have heard all that the Great White Whale said to me." And when she had finished the story of her adventure, prince and princess looked as grave as she.

"It is a journey none of our people could take," said Prince Terrah. "I will go, myself."

"No, no, my brother," cried Erda, flinging her arms about him, "you could not live; you shall not be sacrificed for my happiness."

"No," said the merprincess, "Prince Terrah could not go, because no ship could reach the Land of Ice and Snow. But you are not to give up hope, my Erda; I go myself."

"You!" cried the brother and sister in one breath, "you, Marinna?"

"Yes, I alone can, and I have come to tell you that I start to-morrow."

But then they both began to protest and to plead. Terrah stormed and said:

"You shall not go, Marinna. You will die of

the cold, you who go every winter to the Southern Seas;" and Erda pleaded:

"Do not go, dearest Marinna, I cannot lose you. I should never be happy again if you took this terrible journey for me."

But the little merprincess shook her head.

"I cannot be moved," she said, "I am determined to go. All my plans are laid and my father has sent swift messengers to all the creatures in the Northern Seas to further my journey. I shall be protected, and I know I shall return to you with that which you most desire."

And, although they argued and entreated, she was firm in her purpose, saying finally:

"Come, do not make me unhappy by more pleading. I mean to go, and the time draws near to say good-by."

So they ceased and sat talking of the journey, Erda holding tightly to her friend's little hand.

The parting was sorrowful, but bravely borne.

"You will go away to the great city, my friends, and the merpeople will go to the Southern Seas, so none will be here to miss me from this shore," said Marinna, looking around at the familiar scene, so loved.

"I will wait here, lest you should return," said Terrah.

"No," answered the mermaid, "it is only during the Long Night the star will shine, so I cannot return before spring. You must go with Erda to help her bear the weary waiting and suspense."

"And who will help you bear that which you have to meet, Marinna?" cried the young man.

"Love," answered she. "Good-by, good-by," and without further farewell, she sprang from the rock and swam hurriedly away.

The merpeople were all getting ready for their journey south. At first the King had declared he would not go so much farther away from his daughter, but she answered him:

"Dearest father, even were you here, we would be widely separated, and both you and our people would suffer from the cold. No, please me by going to the Southern Seas, as you always do. Are not all the fish in the ocean under your rule, and will not each be glad to serve you? I shall send many of them to you with messages as I journey north."

So, sighing, the King had yielded to Marinna's plea and given orders for their usual Autumn departure.

They were all assembled now to see their merprincess go, for she was first to take her leave. The great sea shell awaited her, drawn by six swift dolphins, while a guard of as many Tritons surrounded it. The farewells had been said and Marinna took her place in her shell and gave the signal to start. As the dolphins moved off, obedient to her command, she turned and waved her hand to her people, for speak she could not. Then she set her face toward the north and looked back no more.

Day after day the dolphins swam, bearing the merprincess farther and farther from her home. Strange fish and other sea creatures greeted her from time to time, and some were sent with messages to her good father on his way to the Southern Seas.

When they had journeyed many leagues, one of the Tritons attending, said to her:

"My Princess, we approach your first stopping place. See you the land far to the crimson west?"

"I see that which looks like a cloud lying on the water's edge," she made response.

"Its northern point is a rocky cape, beyond which is only the wide sea."

"Then is it the Edge of the Land?" cried the merprincess.

"It is the Edge of the Land, oh Princess."

Eagerly she watched as they drew nearer. Beyond a broad, pebbly beach rose rocks upon which were moving creatures. Presently she saw the shore also was lined with them. Turning to one of the Tritons she asked:

"What are they? I have never seen their like before."

"They are seals, my Princess. They do not come farther south, but they are ruled by our King and will gladly serve you.

And so it proved, for before they had reached the shore, an old seal met them in the shallow water, saying:

"Welcome, oh great Princess, welcome to the Edge of the Land. We wait to serve you."

The merprincess thanked him and asked:

"Have you received a message from the King?"

"We have, oh Princess, and all things are in readiness. Here your Tritons and your dolphins, as well, must await your return, since they can go no farther for the cold. Two swift seals will draw your car and two others shall guard you to the Isle of Rocks. Rest now for we have prepared food for you and also have a gift we hope may please you."

The merprincess sat upon the rocks and ate the delicious sea food the seals had brought her. Then, after she had rested and asked many questions about her farther journey, she prepared to take her place in her shell.

Two young seals came forward, bearing between them something which they laid before the merprincess.

"What is it?" she asked with interest.

"This, oh Princess," answered the chief seal who had first spoken to her, "is the gift we have made for you. We beg you will accept it, for indeed you will greatly need it in those colder waters beyond the Edge of the Land."

The merprincess took it up and lo, it was a soft, warm robe of sealskin. With an exclamation of delight she slipped it on and found it fitted her perfectly. There was even a hood which she drew over her golden head, while the seals looked on, approvingly.

"Oh, kind friends," she cried, "how well you have arranged for my comfort. I shall thank you every day as I go, clad so warmly, on my journey."

"There is a larger robe, also," said the chief seal, and he directed the Triton to spread it over

the sea shell in which the merprincess rode. Then, when she was seated, it was folded all about her.

Thus protected, her rosy face smiling in her hood of fur, she called back thanks and good-bys as her seals bore her swiftly away.

Then came more days of travel for the little mermaid. It grew colder and the days were now very short, for the Long Night was drawing on. But the North Star shone brightly overhead. How often did she gaze up at it in the night time. Sometimes with a sad heart, thinking:

"It is so far above our little earth; even though this be the time, how can a spark reach me from that bright world on high?"

Again, hope flamed anew and she felt sure she could not fail in her quest. She even made a little song which she used to croon softly in the long, lonely nights when she could not sleep.

"Star of the North, gem of the sky,
Remote and lustrous, pure and cold,
Holding the prize for which I sigh
Beyond earth's treasured stores of gold;

"A wanderer I, from distant shore,
A lonely watcher through the night

Who begs, from out thy bounteous store,
A tiny fragment of thy light

"To bless a loved one far away,
For whom I brave the cold and dark.
For her I sing; for her I pray,
Star of the North, a single Spark."

It was a simple little song, but when the mermaid sang it to a plaintive melody she had woven about the words, and her sweet voice blended with the murmur of the waves, the seals thought it the most beautiful song in the world. To be sure, they had never heard any other, but had any one else listened to that sweet, minor melody, he would almost have agreed with them.

One day as they journeyed, one of the seals who guarded her said to Marinna:

"Oh Princess, see you that island far ahead?"

"I see only a black dot upon the waves," answered the merprincess, shading her eyes.

"It is the Isle of Rocks, oh Princess, your second stopping place. We reach it to-morrow."

And the little mermaid was rejoiced that so much of her journey was accomplished.

The next day they reached the Isle of Rocks,

one lonely little bit of land washed on every side by the surging waves of the salt sea. It was strewn with rocks, great and small, and from among them huge, awkward-looking creatures watched their coming.

"Oh, what are these?" whispered the mermaid to the seals. "I have never seen their like before. Is it safe to approach them?"

"They are walrus, my Princess, and although they look wild and strange to you, yet they are ruled by our King and will gladly serve you."

Here one of the huge creatures swam near her and said:

"Welcome, great Princess, to the Isle of Rocks. We who own the merking's rule, wait to obey your command."

Then the merprincess felt no more fear, but thanking him for his welcome asked the walrus:

"Have you received a message from my father, the King?"

"We have, oh, Princess, and all things are in readiness. Here your seals must await your return, since they can go no farther north. My brother will draw your shell and I myself will guard you to the Land of Ice and Snow. Rest now and partake of

the food which we have prepared for you and to-morrow we will start."

And the weary little mermaid was most glad to leave her shell and rest before starting on the last stage of her journey. Yet she was ready and eager to go on in the morning, after bidding good-by to the faithful seals.

The days were very short now. It seemed to Marinna the sun only peeped out for a few short hours, then retired to slumber all the long, long night. Then, too, the cold grew more intense. Sometimes when the chill wind blew, she shivered even beneath her robes of sealskin. Often she saw cakes of ice floating, larger and larger as she drew farther north. Yet other leagues stretched beyond and the sun appeared now for only a few moments each day. At length the walrus who guarded her said:

"See you anything upon the waters, oh, Princess?"

"I see," she answered, straining her eyes, for the daylight was almost gone, "a line of white far ahead."

"It is the Land of Ice and Snow, and here your journey ends."

"And my watching begins," sighed the merprincess, "for here I must wait until I gain what I seek."

And when finally they reached that still, white shore, she knew the sun would shine no more for her, and that the Long Night had begun.

Two shaggy forms stood side by side upon the glittering ice.

"What are they?" said the mermaid. "Surely these are not creatures of the sea."

"No," answered the walrus, "they are Polar bears, yet you need not fear them, for they are here to serve and protect you."

Then the larger of the two white bears spoke:

"Welcome, oh, Princess of the Sea. We have received a message from the great merking, your father, and although we belong to the earth, we gladly serve him and you because you come a guest to our land."

The merprincess thanked them and said:

"My vigil may be long, since this is the beginning of the Long Night, but I will trust to your kindness and wait patiently."

Then the bears led her to a little cave of snow, saying:

"This is the best dwelling place we can offer, but one of us will always be here to guard you, and we have prepared for you a gift."

The mermaid looked around the little cave and saw, spread on a couch of snow, unmelting in that bitter cold, skins of white bear, soft and warm.

"Oh, how good you are!" she cried as she nestled into their shaggy depths. "Now I am warm once more."

The walrus stationed themselves at the entrance of the cave, saying:

"One of us will always be near to serve you while the other seeks food for all," and the little merprincess, guarded well, slept the sleep of the weary.

No one who has not learned to wait, when there is nothing else to be done, in patience and obedience, can know how hard it is. Yet we all must learn this lesson as the mermaid learned it now. At first, she was almost afraid to sleep, lest the Spark fall and she lose it. But the great white Polar bears, and the walrus also, said to her:

"Sleep when you like, merprincess. Two of us will always be on watch so if the Spark should fall, it cannot be lost."

So the mermaid slept, and always her good friends guarded her slumbers. Yet long hours she lay on the icy shore, wrapped in her shaggy white robes, gazing up at the sky where shone, midst millions upon millions of others, the great North Star. She looked at it so steadily that when she closed her eyes, she still seemed to see its radiance. Sometimes she sang the little song she had made. Then the bears and walrus would beg her to sing again, and glad to please these faithful watchers, she would sing the songs which took her back in memory to those happy days when she sat on the rocks with her beloved Erda, and sang to her. Many a time, as she lay and watched the sky, the Northern Lights streamed up, lighting the snowy waste, but no other light was seen. Often she had dropped asleep as she lay watching the stars, and once, in the midst of her slumber, she heard the gruff tones of the Polar bear:

"Awaken quickly, merprincess; behold the sky!"

Almost before her eyes were open, she cried:

"Is the Spark falling?" for her thoughts were always upon her quest.

"No," cried the great beast, "look up!"

But she was already looking up, awed and

trembling at the wonderful sight which met her eyes.

Across the heavens, from side to side, a great arch, a glorious rainbow was sprung, all its seven lovely colors glowing like jeweled bars. From the arch shot forth rays of gorgeous color, quivering and waving back and forth. Columns of light wheeled across the sky and while the awestruck maiden gazed, a flash of crimson lit up the whole scene, dyeing the snow and ice the deepest rose.

"Is the world on fire?" whispered Marinna.

"No," answered her watcher, "it is the Aurora, the Northern Light, but surely the most beautiful ever seen."

The rose tint faded, then came a flash of orange and the world of ice and snow glowed purest golden in its ray. Again, a yellow flash, like sunlight; then a green, and the huge icebergs off the shore were emeralds. The blues followed, then the violet, while the mermaid gazed upon the weird but gorgeous tints, fascinated by their splendor. In the sky the columns rolled, the streamers of crimson and gold and green waved and fluttered. Suddenly, the whole arch shivered and broke and the sky was filled with glittering fragments, like a shower of jewels. The light dimmed slowly, the colors faded, died, and

then the quiet stars shone again in the darkened sky.

No word was spoken for a long time, then the little maid murmured:

"*To have seen this, alone was worth all my journey.*"

So the Long Night wore on.

But, by and by, there came a time, as the mermaid gazed at the North Star, she noted a change in its brilliance. It no longer glowed with a steady light, but trembled and shivered as any star seems to do when one looks at it through tears. The merprincess brushed her hand across her eyes, but they were dry. Then she felt the time had come for which she waited and she watched more eagerly than before. Calm and serene the stars moved across the vast blue space, all but this one which still trembled as if shaken by some giant hand. And then, while the mermaid almost forgot to breathe; while her wide eyes were fixed upon its light, a tiny Spark dropped from the great North Star and fell slowly, slowly through the blue and cloudless sky.

And in all that world of ice and snow, there was none to see save one lone little sea maid, and the four faithful beasts, her servants.

Like a tiny star itself, the Spark floated softly

down, nearer, nearer earth, until at last it dropped gently into the mermaid's outstretched hands. There it rested while tears of joy ran down the pale cheeks of the patient watcher.

Presently she called to the bears and walrus, for all were there:

"Come, oh, faithful ones, and see this wondrous thing!" and they crowded round to see what she held.

It lay in her hand, a gem like a diamond with a bluish tint, while from it flowed the clear, brilliant starlight, throwing a radiance upon all the scene. Suddenly the merprincess caught it to her breast with a little sob, and cried:

"Now we will go home, home, with my precious treasure!" and you may be sure no time was lost in getting ready.

The shell was spread with the shaggy bearskins and the merprincess, in her robes of seal fur, was almost buried in them. But first she had said good-by to the faithful Polar bears, with her arms about their necks.

"Dear friends," she said, "without your goodness and your protection I should not have found my star. I shall never forget you. Oh, what reward is great enough to give you?"

And the huge beasts answered:

"Only love us and think of us, Princess, we ask nothing more. It has made us happy to serve you."

So she went away with her walrus, calling back good-bys.

And it did not seem nearly so far to the Isle of Rocks as they went back, for the clear, soft light which came from the Spark of the North Star glowed all about them, lighting up the waves as though the moon shone on them. The little mermaid's heart was so light she sang her happiest songs, and the walrus swam really quite fast for such clumsy creatures. And by and by the Isle of Rocks loomed in sight, and the sun was shining upon it. The Long Night was over! To be sure it was only a peep of sunshine, but they knew it would grow more and more each day, as they went farther south and Spring drew on. The seals were waiting and gladly did they welcome their Princess. Then came the good-bys to the walrus, and as Marinna patted their huge sides, she said:

"Dear friends, without your kindness and aid I should not have gained my star. I shall always remember what you have done for me, and my father will reward you."

But the walrus said:

"Only love us and think of us, Princess, we ask no other reward. It has made us happy to serve you."

So she rode away with her seals, calling back good-bys.

The days grew longer, the nights shorter, and their darkness was lightened by the soft, silver glow which came from the Spark of the North Star. The merprincess sang her sweetest songs and the pleased seals drew her shell swiftly through the water until, by and by, they arrived at the Edge of the Land where all the seals waited to welcome them. Marinna showed them her treasure and the kind-hearted creatures rejoiced with her. Her Tritons and dolphins waited to take her on to her home, but with her little white hands stroking the seals' fur, she said to them:

"Oh, you who have taken me so far and brought me safely back, how can I thank you enough? What can I do to show that I am truly grateful?"

And the seals who had gone with her to the Isle of Rocks, answered:

"Only love us and think of us, dear Princess. Nothing could make us more happy than that."

So she bade them good-by and rode southward with her dolphins and Tritons as the Spring came on.

The sun was shining, the breeze was blowing and the blue sea was sparkling. All the little waves, with their white caps on, were running races, chasing each other far up the sandy beach. Everything seemed gay and happy as a little mermaid swam toward the great rocks by the shore, watching the wood beyond. Presently she saw two people emerge from beneath the trees and walk down to the sea hand in hand. And she knew them to be Princess Erda and Prince Terrah. It was he who first caught sight of her. Hastening his steps, he called:

"Marinna, Marinna, is it you?"

The little mermaid answered:

"No, Prince, but I bring you a message from her. Our Princess is on her way home, having reached the Edge of the Land, and started southward. The swiftest fish in all the sea has brought this word. She begs that Princess Erda, Prince Terrah, and the great Prince from the North will meet her here three days hence. She asks also that his Majesty the King be present with his Court, since she brings with her that which deserves a royal reception."

"Oh, Terrah!" cried Princess Erda, "she brings that for which she went, my dear Marinna."

"It must be so," he answered her. Then to the mermaid:

"Everything shall be done as your Princess wishes, and we shall await her coming with impatience."

Then Princess Erda drew from her finger a ring set with sparkling diamonds and said to the little mermaid:

"I thank you, oh, bearer of good tidings, and beg you will take from me this ring, in token of my gratitude."

The little sea maid was quite overwhelmed, but Princess Erda slipped the ring upon her finger and she, thanking her sweetly, swam happily away.

Great preparations were made for the coming of the merprincess for all felt it would be an event of deep importance. A swift messenger was sent to the Prince from the North, and two days later he arrived, eager to see the Princess Erda and most curious as to why he had been summoned. An immense pavilion was erected on the seashore and under it was set a throne for the King. Everything was in readiness for the merprincess when the third

morning dawned. And such a goodly company as streamed out of the beech wood down onto the sands, had rarely been seen anywhere. Knights and gentlemen of the Court in bright-hued satins and velvets, lovely ladies in rustling silks and creamy laces. Such a show of flashing jewels, such a picture of charming forms and faces as filled the great tent, it was good to see. When they were gathered there was a sound of silver trumpets, and from under the spreading boughs of the ancient beeches came royalty, itself, the King, the Princess Erda, Prince Terrah, and the Prince from the North. With their attendant lords and ladies they moved slowly to the pavilion where the King took his place upon the throne, the others standing near. Then all eyes were turned to the sea.

Afar off upon the water could be seen approaching a more wondrous company, to these earth people, than that gathered under the tent. For no one of them, save the prince and princess, had ever seen any of the sea folk. Yet here, gliding over the blue water, came the merking and his people. Ahead were the Tritons, blowing on their conch shells, the advance guard of the Court. A mammoth sea shell, drawn by twelve dolphins, held the merking. His

face was grave but kindly and he bore himself with dignity, as became the ruler of the sea. Down over his breast streamed a snowy beard, and his white hair glistened beneath a golden crown.

Following came his daughter in her shell drawn by those six dolphins which had taken her to the Edge of the Land, and brought her home in triumph. And all about them swam the mermaids and mermen of the sea king's Court.

It was truly a marvelous sight and many exclamations of wonder arose among the earth people as the strange folk of the sea drew near.

The King arose from his throne and bowed deeply as the merking reached the shore, the ruler of the sea returning the courtesy. But Prince Terrah and Princess Erda had no eyes for aught save their beloved Marinna. As her sea shell touched the sandy beach, she stepped lightly out and came toward them.

A robe of delicate ribbons of seaweed, woven together, fell from her throat and swept the ground. Its tints were caught from the ever-changing waves; there were gleams of sapphire blue, its folds were clear, pale green and its shadows the silver gray of the sunless sea. A broad band of delicate shells, in rainbow hues, bordered the robe; it was girdled by

a rope of pearls, while strand after strand of these lustrous globes of splendor encircled the white neck of the merprincess and fell to her waist. Her golden hair was braided with strings of pearls and piled upon her little head in a crown a queen might envy. But oh, the love light in her sapphire eyes, the flush of rose upon her cheek, 'twas worth a king's ransom to see.

And in her two little white hands she bore a light, clear and bright beyond the morning sunshine, which bathed her in its radiance. All eyes were upon her as she advanced slowly toward the King. When she reached the foot of the throne she paused and bowing low, said:

"Most potent monarch of the earth, the daughter of the merking brings greeting from the ruler of the sea."

"Fair Princess," quoth the King, "we thank our brother sovereign and return most cordial greetings to him and to thee."

The merprincess continued:

"I have come, oh, King, from a far journey to the Land of Ice and Snow, and I have brought with me a priceless treasure which I crave your permission to bestow upon that one for whom I sought it."

"Whatsoever you will, oh, Princess, that do," answered the King.

Now while all the people of the Court were watching the lovely sea maid and listening to the sweet clear tones of her voice, Princess Erda and the great Prince from the North had eyes only for what she held. Surely, surely that wonderful light could come only from a star, from that star which would give them the happiness for which they longed. Princess Erda grew pale with excitement and trembled so the Prince took her cold little hand and held it tightly in his own, whispering words of hope into her ear.

As the King ceased speaking, Marinna turned to the friend she so loved and said:

"Princess Erda, that which your heart desires, I have to give; a Spark from the North Star."

The Princess Erda stepped forward and bent her head before Marinna who laid upon her dark hair a slender circlet of gold which held the light of that wondrous star. It shone tenderly upon those two fair maids as the brown eyes gazed into the blue ones, then, forgetting King and Court, their arms entwined, their lips met and heart beat against heart.

Then the King spoke, and his voice was husky, his eyes wet:

"Oh, gracious Princess of the sea, such grateful hearts, and full are ours, we have no words to thank thee. For such a gift there can be no reward, yet the half of my kingdom is thine, if thou wilt."

Marinna smiled shyly up at the grateful King.

"The happiness of the Princess Erda is the greatest reward I could ask," she said. "I wish nothing more."

And then Prince Terrah could keep silent no longer. When the merprincess first stepped from her shell he had given a great start, then stood trembling in his overwhelming surprise. He had watched her every motion and now he stepped to her side and taking her hand, addressed the King:

"Oh, gracious sovereign and kind father, upon me let a reward be bestowed, since the Princess Marinna does not desire one."

"What is it, my son?" questioned the surprised King.

"I ask your permission, Sire, to wed the lovely princess who stands before you."

But Marinna drew back.

"No, no," she cried, "you cannot wed me! I am a —," then she stopped suddenly, her face grew very pale and her blue eyes widened.

"You are a woman, an earth princess, like my sister Erda," said the prince, firmly. "When you first stepped from your shell and walked up the beach, I knew this."

The princess looked down, and beneath the shell border of her robe peeped two little white feet! She began to tremble and covered her face with her hands.

Turning to the King, Prince Terrah spoke again:

"Because of her love and sacrifice for another, her forgetfulness of self, this lovely sea princess has received the desire of her heart, to be like that one for whom she has dared so much."

Then the King showed how truly great he was. He stepped down from his throne, his royal robes trailing after him, his glittering crown upon his head, and taking the hand of the Princess Marinna, said:

"Do not weep, most noble and beautiful maiden. I gladly grant the request of my son and shall be proud to receive you as my daughter."

Then he himself led her to the water's edge, where the merking sat in his shell.

"Monarch of the Sea and brother King," he said, "I have the honor to ask the hand of your

most fair and generous daughter, to whom we owe so much, for my son, the Prince Terrah."

The merking answered:

"I thank you, oh great King, for the honor you do me and mine. When my daughter stepped from her shell I perceived she had become like the earth people, and I give her hand in marriage to your son, Prince Terrah."

But here Marinna cried:

"No, no, my father, I cannot leave you!"

"You need not be altogether separated from me, nor from your old friends, my beloved child, for you will retain the power to live in the water as of yore, and you can come to us when you will."

Then the Princess Marinna laid her little hand in that of Prince Terrah, who was close beside her. And while the two kings were exchanging compliments, he whispered:

"Marinna, Marinna, can you really love me?" and she answered:

"Oh, foolish Terrah, I have loved you ever since I first saw you upon this very shore."

The legends of that country tell that never was so beautiful and good and gracious a queen on any throne as Queen Marinna, which she became in

time. And on that very throne now sits her great, great, great,—I do not know how many times great-grandchild. But so many years have gone by since then, that the merpeople must all be gone from those shores. At least, no one sees them now, and never before nor since was there a mermaid who became an earth maiden, save the lovely and loving merprincess, Marinna.

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"The crown decided the King"

THE RUSE OF THE PRINCESS

ONCE upon a time there lived in Roseland, a very clever little Princess; so clever, indeed, that those who knew her often said:

"If you will always do as the Princess Romaine says, you will always do right."

And, in time, many people came to her for advice. But none of them knew that before the Princess answered their questions, she called upon her fairy godmother to help her. This powerful fairy never appeared to any one else, but whenever she was really needed, the Princess summoned her to her aid. First, she dismissed her maidens, then went alone to a little room, high, high up in the tower of the palace, called the turret room. She carefully locked the door behind her, and stuffed her handkerchief into the keyhole, which showed what a wise little Princess she was. Several times her curious maids had followed her on tiptoe, and tried to spy

upon her, but the door was too thick for them to hear the sweet, low voice of their mistress, and the keyhole was stopped up. So they supposed that the Princess only wished to be quiet and to think upon the advice she was to give.

The turret room was a pleasant place in which to sit and think, even if that had been all the Princess did there. It had four large windows opening to the north, the east, the south, and the west. In the morning, the sun came in through the latticed east window, and the soft breeze swayed the morning-glory bells growing in the boxes outside. For where the Princess was, there must be the flowers she so loved. All over the city where she lived this love was known, so whenever any one of her father's subjects had a particularly beautiful flower in his garden, it was sent as a gift of love to the Princess Romaine.

In the turret room the south wind blew over a box of mignonette; the western window blazed with scarlet poppies, redder than the sunset clouds; and in the north window nodded great velvet pansies, the favorite flower of the Princess. They looked so bright and knowing, and she liked to wreath them in her hair, which was long and silky and shone

like spun gold. Her eyes were purple as the pansies, dark and deep; her cheeks blushed pink as the morning-glories; and her little rosebud mouth was a lovelier red than any poppy dared be.

But the Princess did not often go to the turret room for thought alone. After she had shut the door and closed up the keyhole, she picked a great purple pansy, whispered to it and tossed it into the air. The pansy did not fall to the ground, but spreading its petals, like the wings of a butterfly, sailed swiftly away and was soon out of sight.

In a few moments, there floated in at the window a tiny creature of wonderful beauty. Her eyes were as dark, and her hair as golden as the Princess's own, and she wore delicate robes of gossamer, violet and gold, and fairly glittered with dewdrop diamonds. One of these was set in the end of her wand, where it shone like a star.

"And what is it to-day, Romaine?" she would ask, in the sweetest of tones that tinkled like little silver bells. Then Princess Romaine would tell her all, and listen carefully to the advice of her godmother.

When the Princess was about seventeen, and the pride of all, there came one day to the Court a

handsome and gentle youth, riding a splendid white horse and carrying a silver mandolin. He begged for leave to sing and play before the King, and was allowed to do so. His voice proved so beautiful, and his face was so fine and noble, that the Princess asked her father if he would not appoint him Court Minstrel. But the King had eaten truffles for dinner that night (he would do it, although they never agreed with him), and did not feel pleasant, so he said he did not think he would. He was pretty clever himself, the King, clever enough to know that whatever the Princess Romaine suggested, was usually the best thing to do. So he never answered "no" outright, for fear he might have to take it back.

But the Princess, disappointed at his answer, hastened to the turret room and, sending for her fairy godmother, asked if her request might not be granted later.

"Yes, my child," answered the fairy, "it will be. I am watching over the youth, and I intend that he shall remain here."

So the heart of the Princess grew light again, and when she next saw the King (after he had taken a brisk walk and felt better) he said to her:

"I have been thinking about that young singer called Stephanotis, and I have decided to appoint him Court Minstrel."

The Princess smiled gently, but all she said, was:

"It is very kind of you, my father."

So it was settled, and the great white horse, Calla, had a place in the royal stables and a gallop every morning with his master, Stephanotis, the Court Minstrel.

About this time the King began to receive many proposals for the hand of his daughter. Dukes, Counts, and Princes came, but the Princess said to each:

"I thank you, but I do not wish to marry now. I will wait a year or two."

Finally, however, ambassadors came from Prince Stramonium, who ruled over Thorndom, a great country to the north of Roseland. And the ambassadors were more magnificently dressed than any of the suitors had been, and they brought most gorgeous presents to the King and Princess Romaine. There were golden vases set with gems; crystal lamps with perfumed oil; cloth of gold embroidered in many-colored silks; diamonds you could not look at,

without winking; and a crown so brilliant with flashing jewels, that every one was obliged to put on smoked glasses to see it with any comfort.

But although they presented the other gifts outright, the crown, they said, they could not leave unless the King accepted Prince Stramonium's offer of marriage.

Well, the crown decided the King. He sent the ambassadors home with handsome gifts, and a royal message to their Prince that he would be proud to have him for a son-in-law, while the Princess, whom he had not consulted at all, spent the day in tears.

Then heralds were sent out to cry the news through the town, that the great Prince Stramonium of Thorndom was soon to wed the Princess Romaine. Upon hearing this, Stephanotis, the young Court Minstrel, turned very pale and hurrying to the palace, asked to see the King alone. But that great person was too busy with arrangements for the wedding, which was to take place in three days, to see him until late in the evening. When he came at last into the presence of the King, the young man told him that he, Stephanotis, was the rightful Prince of Thorndom, driven from his father's throne by the wicked Stramonium.

At this the King, who had eaten an unusual quantity of truffles for dinner, flew into a terrible fit of anger and told Stephanotis he did not believe one word he said. Then he ordered him to leave the kingdom at once, on pain of death, and raged until he happened to think of the crown. Thereupon, putting on his smoked glasses, he went to have a look at it, to cool himself down.

The next morning, early, Stephanotis went to the Princess with his story, and being such a clever little Princess, she knew at once it was true. Then Stephanotis, encouraged by her kindness, told her how he loved her and said that, if he had his kingdom back, he would ask her to marry him. Now, of course, he could not, seeing he was only a poor minstrel. Then the Princess said, very sweetly, that she would rather marry him, poor as he was, than Prince Stramonium with all his wealth, including the crown, and that she would call on her fairy godmother for help. So Stephanotis left her and she flew to the turret room.

After the fairy had been summoned and heard all the story, she said:

"You did well, Romaine, to believe in Stephanotis, for he is indeed the rightful Prince,

and you must both now do exactly as I tell you. It is but two days until your wedding, so to-morrow you must make, here in the turret room, a waxen image of yourself. I will give you the skill. You then must dress it in your bridal robes, and on the stroke of midnight, touch its lips, eyes, hands, and feet with the ointment in this little golden box. Then go out softly, leaving the door ajar. Stephanotis must be waiting at the outer gate with Calla; all the warders will be asleep and you can easily unlock the doors. Then you will ride with Stephanotis to his kingdom, Thorndom, where are to be found loyal hearts and willing hands to set you both upon the throne. Do exactly as I command and be afraid of nothing."

So saying, the fairy disappeared, and the Princess went to send her message to Stephanotis.

The next morning she began to mold the waxen figure, and as it grew under her fingers, guided by a magic skill, and came to look more and more like her, she seemed to see her own image as in a mirror. When at last it was finished, all the Princess had to do was to try on her wedding clothes, which a hundred dressmakers and milliners were working upon, day and night, and to wait

for the hour in which she was to take her flight.

The fairy had delayed Prince Stramonium by all sorts of accidents until it was impossible for him to arrive before the day set for the wedding. So the King was bustling all over the palace, hurrying and worrying the army of carpenters, upholsterers, and decorators working there, what time he was not looking at the crown and chuckling to think how easily he had got rid of Stephanotis.

The Princess dismissed her maidens in the evening, bidding them go to rest, as they must be up early on the wedding morning. Then she went to say good-night to the King, kissing him very tenderly. But the King was feasting his eyes (guarded, of course, by his smoked glasses) on the crown, so returned her caress in an absent-minded way, his kiss falling on the end of her nose and his ears closed to the little sob which escaped her. Then she went to the turret room, locked the door, closed up the keyhole, dressed the waxen figure in her own bridal robes, took the little golden box of magic ointment out of her pocket, and waited for midnight.

As the great clock in the steeple above her boomed out the hour, the Princess shivered slightly,

then she anointed the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet of the image. At first nothing happened; then the eyes opened, the pretty mouth smiled at her, the waxen Princess stretched out her hands and took a step toward Romaine. Startled, the real Princess ran out of the room, not forgetting, however, to leave the door ajar, through which she thought she heard the tinkling laugh of the fairy.

Then she sped down long halls where the lights burned dimly; through vast rooms of state, where her little feet sank softly into the thick velvet of the carpets; now across patches of moonlight; now in shadow; until she reached the palace door, where two sentries slept as they stood. Noiselessly she turned the key, slipped the bolts, and was out in the clear summer night.

Gate after gate she passed, all the warders asleep, while the dogs only licked the little hands they loved and, whining, begged to follow her. As she passed through the outermost portal, Stephanotis caught her in his arms, lifted her on Calla, sprang up in front, and they were off like the wind.

A few hours later, before the faintest flush in the east showed that morning was near, there was waking and stirring in the palace, for it was the

Princess's wedding day. Fifty cooks were busy making ready for the feast, and when morning really dawned, the whole place was humming like a hive of bees. Hurrying to the Princess's rooms, her maidens were startled not to find her there. They stood gazing at each other in wonder until one suggested:

"Perhaps she is in the turret room," and up they climbed into that high, high tower, to look for their dear mistress.

"See," they whispered, "the door is ajar. Dare we disturb her?"

They waited and waited until the hour grew late, then one pushed the door wide open, and they saw the Princess standing by the window.

"It is late, your Royal Highness," said the maid, timidly, and the Princess turned stiffly, and went silently down the stairs, followed by her wondering maidens.

It was about this time that the King, attended by his knights and guard of honor, was riding out of the city gate to meet Prince Stramonium. From afar they saw a cloud of dust, and out of the heart of it presently appeared a company of horsemen in scarlet and gold. Following these came a band in

blue and silver; next, camels laden with gifts for the Princess; then a host of warriors in armor which shone like burnished gold. Above all, floated the azure silken banners of Thorndom, and, in the midst of the company, four enormous black slaves bore a gorgeous litter of ebony and crimson cloth, from which, as they reached the King, stepped Prince Stramonium.

It had been arranged that at first sight of the bridegroom a shout of welcome should be given by the knights of Roseland; but no one had breath enough for this, after the surprise of seeing the Prince. He was a little yellow, wrinkled old man, with a long gray beard, and his face was evil to look upon. In a harsh, cracked voice he saluted the King, and, although that monarch tried to respond politely, he was quite dazed and spoke but seldom as they rode to the palace.

The streets were gay with banners and strewn with flowers, but the people who crowded them were strangely silent until the King and Prince had passed. Then the women burst into tears, exclaiming:

"Do we give our Princess to that ugly little monster?" while the men went about frowning and

grumbling. When they reached the palace, the King had to spend a whole hour with the crown before he could compose himself for the wedding.

Well, the marriage took place in the great cathedral, and was followed by the ringing of bells and the booming of cannon, but every one remarked how pale and still the Princess was, and many shed tears as the bridal party returned to the palace. Even at the wedding feast, the bridegroom only was gay, and many faces were frowning and sad. The Princess ate nothing, and the King refused truffles!

Prince Stramonium, you may be sure, had felt the dislike he saw in every face, and was bursting with rage which he found hard to contain. The silence of courtiers, the frigid politeness of the King, and above all, the cold looks of the Princess, angered him almost beyond control. At this point, a note was handed the King, which ran:

> "My Dear and Royal Father:
> When this letter reaches you, I shall be far away in my new home, Thorndom, the wife of its rightful Prince, Stephanotis,—"

Stramonium, who had been impolitely reading over the King's shoulder, here gave a loud cry, and the clock struck twelve! Turning to what they had

supposed to be the Princess Romaine, they saw only a waxen image, for the magic ointment had lost its power and the poor figure, too near the fire, was beginning to melt. Large drops were rolling down its face and in a short time, it had become a shapeless mass of wax under the astonished eyes of the Court.

Too angry to speak, the false Prince Stramonium swelled with rage at the trick played upon him by the clever little Princess. More and more furious he grew, more and more fiery glowed his eyeballs when, suddenly, a loud report was heard, a burst of flame enveloped him, and the frightened King and Court tumbled over one another trying to get to the door.

When they dared come back, after a long time, all that was left of Prince Stramonium was a little heap of ashes.

"Remove this vile usurper," commanded the King, sternly, "while my ambassadors prepare to carry my royal blessing to my son-in-law, the great Prince Stephanotis of Thorndom, and also to my daughter, the Princess Romaine."

Then he turned to the royal butler with a smile, and said: "Bring on the truffles!"

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"He drew his sword and advanced upon the serpent"

PRINCE ALMOR AND THE BLIND PRINCESS

NO one could understand how it came to pass. The King was a remarkably handsome man, tall and straight and magnificent, especially in his robes of state; the Queen was gentle and beautiful; and the six Princesses were so wondrously lovely that they had long ago been married to the most powerful Kings and Princes. But the Prince, their young brother, the only son, was hopelessly, hideously ugly. From the crown of his head to the soles of his feet he was utterly repulsive to look upon. His hands and feet were huge and misshapen, his scant hair was a lifeless drab color, his poor little weak eyes were crossed, his skin was sallow, his nose awry, his mouth was a thin, straight slit, and his ears started out from his head as though trying to fly from such a frightful countenance. No wonder the people shuddered when they saw him, and groaned to think that he must one day reign over them.

There was nothing beautiful about him—wait, there was one thing, his voice. It was soft and clear as a silver bell, with such tenderness in it, that if you closed your eyes and listened to it for a few moments, you found yourself loving the Prince for it, and forgetting all about his looks. And when he sang, as he sometimes did, the nightingales were silent for very shame, the winds were still, and those who heard him held their breath to listen as the exquisite, tenderly sad melody filled the air.

For Prince Almor was always sad. He had a brave and gentle heart which yearned for love, yet he knew too well, that none who saw could love him and his life was very lonely. The sight of him only angered the King, so he kept away from him all he could. After night had fallen, he sometimes went to his mother's door, and she, moved by his beautiful voice, spoke kindly and lovingly to him. But of that real, true love for which he longed, he had none.

The palace of the King stood close by the sea, on a tongue of land which jutted far out into the water so you could look east, south, and west to where the distant sky bent down to kiss the waves. To the north were the gardens, but the Prince's

rooms looked out over the sea and from his babyhood he had loved old Ocean. The murmur of its waves had lulled the lonely child to sleep, its smiling waters greeted him when he awakened, and his favorite haunt was down on the rocks where the breakers curled almost at his feet. Long ere he had grown to manhood, he had found there a companionship and comfort naught else could give him. For it was there he first knew and loved the moon-fairies, those delicate sprites who dance over the waters in the moonbeams. As he sat on the sands, a desolate, lonely little child, forgotten by careless nurses, they came to comfort him. They brought him bright dreams, they taught him rare melodies, and—they loved him. For fairies are not like mortals, they do not look only at the outside, and they knew how beautiful was the heart of this ugly, neglected child. So they loved him and taught him and helped him to grow in beauty of life, until a strong, brave manhood filled the homely body of the Prince.

It is true they came not so often to the man as to the child, but fairies rarely come at all to grown people. Mostly, because they do not believe in them. But the Prince did, and loved them, and

when he needed help, they were always ready to give it, all he asked and more. So things went until Prince Almor was twenty-one. Then the Queen said, hesitatingly, to her husband:

"My dear—, you know—, I think—, would it not be best for our son to marry?

King Loro was silent a moment, gnawing his beard in wrath, then he broke out with:

"To whom dare I propose for him?" Who would look at such a figure as his in the light of a suitor?"

And the Queen sighed and answered:

"You are right, my dear. I suppose it is out of the question."

Still it remained in the King's mind and he pondered it deeply.

Now, as it happened, there was in an adjoining kingdom a most beautiful Princess, who, alas, was blind. Her father and mother were dead and she should have been queen, but her uncle, crafty and cunning, sat upon the throne and pretended to rule for her. The people loved their young Princess and had she only not been blind, would have made her queen. As it was, they grumbled a good deal over the state of things but did nothing. The uncle of the Princess Vea was kind to her, because he dared

not be otherwise, but in his heart he was always wishing he might get rid of her. So when he heard that King Loro desired a wife for his ugly son, his evil heart leaped for joy at the plan which came into his mind.

First of all he invited the Prince, most cordially, to make him a visit and, though Almor dreaded to go among strangers, it was so urged upon him that he could not refuse. He set forth with sorrow, knowing the mortification he would have to endure. But before he arrived, the uncle of the Princess Vea had forbidden every one, on pain of death, to speak to her of the Prince's looks.

Well, although he did not deserve it, everything went to suit the wicked uncle. Prince Almor loved the beautiful Vea from the moment he saw her, and she, poor Princess who could not see, heard the exquisite voice of the Prince and loved him. As soon as the visit was over and the Prince again at home, the crafty uncle of the Princess asked her kindly if she would be willing to marry Almor. The Prince, he told her, desired this, but he, her loving uncle, thought only of her happiness. And the Princess, who had been grieving out her heart over the Prince's departure, believed him and thanked

him for his kindness, saying very prettily that she would gladly consent to be the bride of this charming Prince.

Then the uncle sent a private letter, by a swift messenger, to King Loro, offering the hand of his niece in marriage to Prince Almor. The King could scarcely believe his eyes. He hastened to the Queen with the letter. When she had read it, she said:

"But, my dear, the Princess Vea is blind!"

"So much the better," almost shouted the King. "Why, can't you see that is the only kind of woman he could win. She is both very beautiful and very rich, and she actually wants to marry him."

"I hope, my dear, they will be happy," sighed the Queen.

But the Prince, himself, was the greatest drawback to the plan of the King's. He declared he would not marry the Princess, although he loved her so dearly. It was a bitter shame, he said, to so deceive her because she was blind. If she could see, he knew she would loathe him. At this, the King grew very angry.

"It's precisely because she cannot see, that she is the very wife for you," he blurted out, "and marry her you shall!"

Still the Prince would not consent until he had seen the Princess Vea again and explained to her how homely he was. There was nothing to be done but to let him go, although both kings were afraid of the result.

"Princess," said the poor lover, when he was alone with her, "Princess, they are deceiving you. You do not know, but I am hopelessly, hideously ugly." The Princess Vea laughed.

"I do not believe that," she said.

"But indeed I am, dear Princess, and while I love you with all my heart, I cannot let you think me other than I am."

"And I love you with all my heart," said the Princess, quite pale with emotion, "and I shall die if you leave me. I do not believe you are anything but beautiful, but I do not care, I love you."

Then the Prince yielded and they were married.

And they were happy. Songs and soft laughter filled that part of the palace which had been given to the Prince and Princess. Their attendants went about with smiles upon their faces and happy thoughts within their hearts, and even the gruff King softened under the influence of his beautiful,

new daughter. And, by and by, the people began to say:

"Is not our Prince less homely, now that he is so happily married?"

And often the answer was:

"Yes, indeed. I begin to see quite a change in him," although really, the only change was that now he looked happy, whereas he had before looked sad.

So things continued for a whole, glad year. But, by and by, it seemed to the Prince that the Princess laughed less and was often very quiet for a long time. When he asked, gently:

"Of what are you thinking, dearest?" the Princess would start guiltily and be gayer than ever.

But there came a time when she could no longer conceal the fact that she was most unhappy. The Prince often saw traces of tears upon her face and sometimes found her weeping bitterly. To none of his questions would she give answer, and the poor distracted Prince could think of but one reason for her sorrow. She had ceased to love him. Yes, he was quite sure it was that. And how deeply did he reproach himself that he had taken advantage of this gentle, blind Princess who, he felt, would never have

married him, had she been able to see. Some one must have told her how hideous he really was, and all he could do now was to go away and leave her in peace. So he went back to the rooms overhanging the sea, in which he had lived as a child, and the Princess sat alone and wept.

Around her moved gently her pitying maids, while sighs and tears took the place of laughter and song in all the palace. The King was furious with this state of things, but when the Queen said:

"I was afraid, my dear, it would not be a happy match," he could think of no suitable reply, so flung himself out of the room, choking with anger.

As the Prince sat despairingly by his window, or at night paced the sands of the seashore, thoughts of his old friends the moon-fairies came to him now and then. But they at first were so vague, that he put them aside as childish dreams. They grew on him, however, so that, by and by, he began to lift his hopeless eyes from the sands and look out over the vast, shimmering surface of the sea. And there lay the silvery path of moonbeams, reaching from his feet out and up to the moon itself, floating through the blue sky. And stronger grew his memories of the help and comfort which used to come to him, a

lonely child, down that shining way. Through his tears then the Prince saw, afar off and dimly, forms of light floating down the path and, stretching out his arms to them, he cried:

"Oh, dear moon-fairies, if you be true and not only dreams; if you did come to me, when a little child, and comfort me, oh, come now, when I need you as never before."

There was a fluttering of silver wings, a rustling of white garments, and the good fairies came down the path of moonbeams and stood before the Prince.

"We have come in answer to thy call, Prince Almor. What is thy need?"

Then the Prince told them all; how happy he and the Princess had been until this strange sorrow took possession of her.

"Now she will not tell me what is the cause of her tears," he said. "But," he added, "only I am to blame. Had she not been blind, she would never have married me, and it is not her fault that she has ceased to love me." He was silent and a moon-fairy answered:

"Although sorrow has come, no wrong has been done, and the Princess still loves thee. Go to her now and she will answer thy questions."

The Prince, greatly comforted, thanked the fairies and hastened to seek the Princess.

He found her in the garden, her head bowed in her hands, the crystal tears dropping between her fingers. He sat down beside her, drawing her to him, and said:

"Dearest heart, why do you weep?"

"Because you have forsaken me and no longer love me," replied the Princess, between her sobs.

"I will never forsake you again, and I love you more than my own life," answered Prince Almor. "But when we were yet happy together, what was it came to trouble you and make you weep?"

"Now I will tell you," said the Princess, "it was because I was blind."

"But that had been for many years," the Prince answered, gently, "yet were you happy."

"Yes," responded the Princess, "from the time I was a little child. Once I could see, and I dimly remember how looked my mother's face. But, after being blind so long, I came not greatly to care to see; I only grieved that I was lonely. Then you came and I was so happy I forgot that I was blind." The Princess paused and the perplexed Prince said:

"Then, heart of my heart, why remember it, only

to grieve? Why not smile and be glad once more?"

"Because I want to see you," she broke out. The Prince shuddered.

"Because I know you are so beautiful, and every one, down to the meanest slave in your kingdom, may look upon your gracious countenance; every one, save the wife who loves you more than they all," and she fell to weeping more bitterly than before.

"But, my beloved," cried the astonished Prince, "it is only because you cannot see me, that you are able to love me at all. Were your eyes opened now, you would turn from me with hatred and loathing. You know I told you in the beginning, how hideous I was. At least I have never deceived you," said the poor Prince.

"I do not believe it," stoutly asserted the Princess. "What, because I am not able to see, can I not feel? Have you not often told me," she continued, triumphantly, "that my thoughts were always right?"

"Yes," groaned the Prince, "but now—"

"I do not care, I must see you! I must, or I shall die!"

The Prince tried in vain to comfort her, but she kept repeating:

"I shall die if I do not see you," until finally, she sobbed herself to sleep in his arms. He bore her to the palace and gave her in charge of her maids. Then he hastened to the seashore.

The night was far advanced and the moon was near its setting. But broader and brighter than before stretched the shining pathway, and at the end which touched the shore, waited the band of moon-fairies. When the Prince had told them all that had passed between the Princess and himself, the fairy who had before spoken to him, said:

"The Princess speaketh truly, Prince Almor. If she cannot see thee she will surely die, because her heart is set upon this one desire."

"What then can I do to save her?" asked the Prince. "Is there any cure for her?"

"There is," answered the moon-fairy, gravely.

"Oh, what and where is it?" eagerly besought the Prince.

"Remember, Prince Almor, that if the eyes of the Princess are opened, she will see—thee!"

The Prince started. He had for the moment forgotten it. And when she saw him, she would hate him. Then again, if she remained blind, she would die. In awful doubt and distress of mind

the Prince paced the sands, hour after hour, unheeding of time. The moon set and darkness covered both earth and sea; the night breezes swept the sands; the waves dashed their salt spray in his face, but the Prince saw and felt none of them.

Lose the Princess, he must. Either she would die, being denied her wish, or in the fulfillment of it, turn from him and hate him. Then a thought came to him, like a ray of light. At least, even if he lost her, she, seeing, might yet be happy. And the heart of the Prince grew almost glad again. The moon-fairies, where were they? They could show him the way to serve the Princess. He turned his eyes to the sea and upon it broke the dawn. Each tiny ripple laughed in the rays of the rising sun and the sky flushed like a rose. And the Prince rejoiced as does one who has conquered himself.

All day he waited on the shore, for why should he go to the Princess until he had good news to take her? So he waited for the night, and the coming of the moon-fairies, impatiently. But as twilight fell, peace came into his heart, and then he saw the moon rise out of the sea, high and higher, dripping silver stars over all the heavens. And down the path of moonbeams floated his fairy friends.

"Hast thou chosen, then?" said the first fairy.

"I have chosen," responded the Prince. "Let the Princess see."

"Know then," said the fairy, "that thou alone can'st find for her the Healing Water. Far away, over wide plains and across many waters, rises the Crystal Spring in the heart of the Purple Mountains."

"I will go," said the Prince, simply.

"Take then this flask," and the moon-fairy gave him a tiny vial of crystal, "for the Water of Healing can be held in none other. Turn thy face from the sea and follow always the North Star. This shall lead thee, after many days, to the Purple Mountains, guarding the Crystal Spring. The way is long and full of danger, but Love and Courage shall overcome all."

As the fairy ceased to speak, the band faded from Prince Almor's sight and he hastened to find the Princess.

She heard him gladly. She dried her eyes and smiles again wreathed her lips.

"Now shall we indeed be happy," she said, "when you return. But stay not long, beloved."

"The Crystal Spring lies a great way off,"

began the Prince, but seeing a cloud come over the face of the Princess, he added, quickly:

"But I shall return with the Water of Healing. Think only of that, and the time will not seem long."

And he told her not of the dangers in the way, but said farewell as if for but a day and left her smiling.

Truly, though, the way was long and beset by many dangers. As he traveled over wide desert spaces, under a burning sun, fearful of the robber bands which raided them; as he plunged into dark forests and heard the howling of savage beasts; when the foaming torrent of a river in his path threatened to ingulf him; the poor Prince feared again and again that he should never reach the Purple Mountains. Then he whispered to himself the last words of the fairy, "Love and Courage shall overcome all," and was cheered by them.

At last he saw across a wide, flat country, the beautiful Purple Mountains whose peaks seemed to touch the sky, and knew his journey almost ended. A day and night more and he was in the foothills. Another day, and he had crossed a mountain pass

and descended into a valley, surrounded by the circle of Purple Mountains which guard the Crystal Spring. Here he lay down to rest and slept until morning dawned.

When he awakened, it was with no sense of weariness. He sprang up, fresh and vigorous as though his journey had just begun, and surveyed the valley beyond. Such a scene of beauty had never before met his eyes. The close, green grass was like velvet, embroidered with wild flowers of every hue; roses clambered over each little knoll and the wild clematis flung its snowy sprays from rock to rock; birds sang joyously and the murmur of waters fell upon his ear. In the center of the valley he could see a fountain rising high in air and falling back in showers of diamond drops.

"It is the Crystal Spring!" he cried in delight, and hastened toward it.

As he drew nearer, there seemed to be about it a strange barrier. The Prince wondered more and more, as he advanced, what it might be, when suddenly it moved. A watchful head was raised and the Prince cried out in his terrified surprise. For it was an enormous serpent, wound coil on coil about the fountain. Awhile the Prince stood dumb with

fear, then his white lips moved. He was saying:

"Love and Courage; Love and Courage."

Then he drew his sword and advanced upon the serpent. The great reptile, waiting silently until he was within reach, delivered a lightning blow with his head, hurling the Prince backward upon the grass. Slightly stunned, but unhurt, the Prince soon arose and made another attack, this time going to the other side of the fountain. But the fearful head moved with him, facing him at every step, and as soon as the Prince came again within reach, delivered another swift blow, with the same result.

All day the unequal combat was kept up and at nightfall the Prince, utterly discouraged, sat with his head in his hands, trying to think of a way to gain the fountain. The full, round moon rose in the eastern sky, flooding the valley with its light, and the Prince finally raised his head and looked at it. The thought of his faithful friends came to him and he cried:

"Oh, dear fairies, come to me! I need you now, for I have done all I can alone." A familiar voice answered him:

"Give me the flask," and the Prince saw beside him the moon-fairy.

He gave the flask into her outstretched hand and the fairy flew toward the fountain. Far above the head of the watchful serpent she floated and filled the tiny crystal vial with the Water of Healing. Returning, she gave it to the Prince and vanished in the midst of his thanks. Then he lay down and slept a deep, deep sleep.

Yet through it all he was conscious of the fluttering of wings, and of being borne swiftly through the air for many leagues. On and on, as the hours of the night passed and the Prince slept, the fairies bore him to his home, and ere the moon sank to rest in the sea, they had laid him gently on the sands in the shadow of the palace.

The morning sunbeams kissed the eyelids of the Prince and they opened upon the old, familiar scenes of his childhood. He sat up in great surprise, not knowing how he came there, and wondering if his adventures had been a dream. But no, for in his hand was the tiny crystal flask, filled with the Water of Healing. Then he sprang up and hurried to find the Princess Vea.

She sat in the garden, her face turned toward the gate by which the Prince had left her, waiting, as she had sat and waited every day since his

departure. Her face was pale but there were no tears upon it. As the Prince reached the gate, she rose. Her quick ears had caught the first sound of his feet, and she cried, tremblingly:

"Is it you, my love?"

"It is I," answered the Prince, as he caught her in his arms.

For a long moment neither spoke, then the Princess whispered:

"Have you brought the Water of Healing?"

"Yes," he answered, slowly.

"Then let me see, oh, let me see!" she panted.

The Prince drew the flask from his breast with a sinking heart, then paused for a last look at the Princess. When her eyes should open, there would be in them only horror and pain at the first sight of him, her husband. Then:

"Why do you wait?" demanded the Princess, trembling all over. The poor Prince, tears running down his face, murmured to himself:

"Love and Courage, Love and Courage," and opened the flask.

His hands were shaking so that half of the precious water spilled upon him. A strong shock ran through his whole body, but he managed to pour the

rest upon the eyelids of the Princess. Then he closed his own, that he might not see her change, and tried to move away. But she held him fast, and in a moment he heard a glad cry from her:

"I see! Oh, beloved, I see!" and she laid her head upon his breast. Then she caught him by the shoulders, pushed him from her the length of her arms, and looked long into his face. Smiling through tears, she said:

"Oh, it was true! Only you are more beautiful than I dreamed!"

The Prince gasped; had her mind gone from her? Seeing his bewildered look, she cried:

"Come then and see," and dragged him to the clear water of a fountain near. He looked in. Who was that by the side of the Princess? A tall, straight figure; a face of strength and beauty, with flashing eyes and dark hair waving above a broad, white brow. He looked on every side, but no one was in sight, only the Princess mirrored in the fountain clinging to that strange figure, as the real Princess clung to him. And the truth dawned upon the Prince!

For, of course, you know what had happened. When the Prince spilled upon himself the Water of

Healing it had beautified him, as it must everything it touches. And in that country, they tell to this day, the story of the love of Prince Almor for the blind Princess, and its reward.

THE KING'S MISTAKE; OR THE PRINCE WHO HAD NO FAIRY GODMOTHER

IT all came about through the Prince's having no fairy godmother, and that was the fault of the King. There were seven Princesses and when each came, the Queen gave a large ball to the fairies of the kingdom, and chose one of the most powerful of them as godmother for her little daughter. Each time the King said it was really unnecessary, that fairy godmothers were going out of style and only a few old-fashioned people had them any more. But the Queen always answered firmly that she should feel safer about her daughters, and that in her opinion, no well-regulated Princess should be without a fairy godmother.

But when the Prince Alfahdin was born, oh, that was a different matter! The King swelled visibly with pride and satisfaction, and when the Queen suggested the usual fairies' ball, he said:

"No, Madam! My son needs no assistance from any fairy. Being my son, he will be amply able to take care of himself."

Usually the King was most polite to his wife, so when he said:

"No, Madam!" in that tone of voice, the Queen knew it was of no use to try to change his mind. So she contented herself by teaching the seven little Princesses that they must watch over and care for their brother all through life.

Now, fortunately, there were no bad fairies in the kingdom, so although they were somewhat surprised, the fairies were not at all angry at the action of the King. They shook their wise little heads, however, and said His Majesty was making a mistake, and the Queen, at least, agreed with them.

But the Prince grew up like other youths, without any serious mishaps, and at twenty was quite a fine young man. A little headstrong, perhaps, and not given to the taking of advice, but what would you have? A youth with seven sisters and a fond

mother and father to spoil him, beside a court full of people to keep always in his mind that he, and he alone, was— the Prince! So when he made up his mind to set off alone to seek the Princess Irmentrude, any one who knew him would have been sure he would carry out his project.

Not that there were no objections. The King raged, the Princesses pleaded, and the Queen wept. But while the Prince winced at his mother's tears, he showed no signs of yielding to them.

It was all well enough to go seeking the Princess Irmentrude; a marriage with her would do credit to any kingdom; but why not go in the style befitting the son of a great monarch? Surely the Princess herself was worthy such honor. They had never seen her, but every caravan which came across the desert brought tales of her beauty and wisdom, as well as of the wondrous wealth of the kingdom over which she reigned alone. Although but seventeen, suitors were daily turned sorrowing away from the palace doors, after they had failed to win her heart.

So it was no wonder the Prince longed to see this much-sought Princess, and was determined to win her for his bride. No one objected to that, only to his foolish plan of going alone; but the Prince

had, none knew why, some equally foolish idea of being loved for himself, not for rank nor wealth.

So he set out one day on his night-black steed, Pluto, with his face toward the west, where lay the kingdom of the Princess Irmentrude. The King would not say good-by nor see him go, but his mother's eyes followed him until tears blinded them, and the seven sisters stood on the terrace, in their rainbow-colored garments, and waved farewells until the Prince and his steed were only a little black speck against the setting sun.

To tell the truth, Prince Alfahdin thought it a very fine thing to get off by himself and do as he pleased, as though he had not been doing that all the twenty years of his life! He and the good horse together enjoyed that first wild gallop, and when night came on, they stopped by a little rill in a grassy meadow. Here the Prince alighted and after a plentiful meal from the supplies he carried, lay down on the soft turf and slept quite as soundly as in his golden bed in the palace.

The next morning, all in the pink dawn, man and horse were eager to get on. They followed the little brook until it began to fail. Its shining stream grew less and less, it ceased its pleasant

chatter and dwindled to a very thread of silver. At the last shallow pool the Prince alighted, no longer on grassy meadowland, but amid sand and rocks. All silently he ate his midday meal, and both he and Pluto drank deeply of the clear water, with which the Prince filled again his flask. Then somewhat heartened, they set out again over the desert.

Sand, sand, sand! Nothing else to be seen except, far to the north, a rim of purple mountains in a shimmery, golden haze. All day they galloped steadily on, but at nightfall there was still only the sand on every side, and a little pool of brackish water which Pluto drank eagerly, munching the half-withered shrubs which grew at its brink. But he whinnied cheerfully when his master stroked his satin coat, upon which sparkled a few bright drops, not all of dew.

The next morning they were off again, still galloping toward the west where, far out of sight, lay the city of the Princess Irmentrude. Toward night, the Prince, seeing afar three moving forms upon the sand, hastened toward them, thinking to find food and guides. But, alas, they proved to be three robbers of the desert and, far from befriending him, they overpowered him, took from him all he

had, beat him, and left him for dead upon the sand. Then they rode away, leading Pluto who neighed loudly after his master. The Prince had fought nobly, but in vain, and when night came he lay as one dead upon the desert, in the soft, pitying light of the moon.

It was that night his eldest sister, the Princess Prima, could not sleep. She lay in her golden bed, thinking of the absent Alfahdin, and watching the rosy silken curtains as they swayed gently in the breeze. Suddenly her heart gave a great bound, and she sprang from her bed, crying:

"Something dreadful has befallen my brother! What shall I do?" but as she clasped her hands together, she felt her ruby ring. This her fairy godmother had given her, saying:

"Whenever you need help, my child, summon me."

Now all the Princesses slept on the west side of the palace, overlooking the gardens, and each had under her window a bed of the flowers she loved best. The Princess Prima ran to her window, leaned far out and dropped her ruby ring down among the crimson roses growing beneath. Instantly a little fay flew up with it, saying:

'What is your will, Princess? I await your commands."

The Princess answered, tremblingly:

"Hasten to my fairy godmother, and beg her to come to me immediately."

The little fay was off like a streak of flame and, before the Princess had time to draw a second breath, her godmother stood before her.

"Oh, Godmother," gasped the Princess, "I feel my brother, the Prince, is in great danger. Help him for my sake."

"I will," said the fairy, as she waved her wand over the Princess Prima's head. Immediately she felt herself growing smaller and changing in form. In a moment of time, she was no longer the Princess Prima, but a tiny white hare to whom the fairy said:

"Go quickly, and do that I shall tell thee."

The hare sprang from the window, dashed through the gardens, leaped the outer wall and skimmed across the desert like an arrow, the fairy flying above. When they found the Prince, the little hare wept, believing him dead, but the fairy said:

"Go quickly, get the leaves of yonder plant and put them on his wounds. If thou but hasten, he shall live."

So the little hare made haste. Biting off the leaves she laid them on his wounds, running to and fro until all were covered.

"It is enough," said the fairy, and they sped back to the palace, where the Princess Prima awoke in the morning, in her own little bed behind the rosy curtains, with a heart full of peace, sure that all was well with her brother.

As for the Prince, when he was awakened by the first sunbeams, he sprang to his feet, feeling stronger than ever before in his life. There was nothing to do but journey on, so he set his face steadfastly toward the west, and vowed he would win the Princess yet.

But the sun rose higher and higher in the heavens, beating down upon his head with all the force of its fiery rays, until at last he cried out:

"How can I go farther in this dreadful heat?" and sank down upon the sand.

At this moment his sister, the Princess Dua, was leaning from her window, thinking of him and wishing he might have some of the golden oranges growing in her garden among their glossy leaves. Suddenly a pang shot through her heart, and she felt that her brother was in danger. Quickly

she unfastened from the chain which bound it to her wrist, a little ball of topaz which she tossed down among the orange trees.

Instantly a tiny figure, clothed in chain armor which glistened like woven sunbeams, appeared before her. Returning the topaz ball, he asked:

"What are your commands, my Princess?"

"Call to me, at once, my fairy godmother," said the Princess Dua, and ere she could so much as wink an eye, the fairy stood before her.

"My brother Alfahdin is in danger! Oh, save him," cried the Princess.

The fairy waved her wand and the Princess began to change. Her pretty white hands became strong talons, dark feathers grew out upon her, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the Princess Dua was a great eagle.

"Go," said her godmother, "and hover above him until the sun goes down."

Forth from the window darted the huge bird, and in a moment it was only a speck against the blue sky. A little later, the Prince looked up to find himself covered by a dark shadow and, as he plucked up heart to continue his journey, it went with him, the outstretched wings fanning him gently.

Even with this protection, for which he was most grateful, the Prince suffered frightfully from thirst. For several hours he walked bravely on, now fancying he could see the shining towers of the city of the Princess. But finally he cried:

"Alas, I shall die of thirst in the desert, though I am so near my journey's end!"

It was at this time the Princess Tertia, in her dainty yellow gown, was strolling through the garden, gathering buttercups and wishing for her brother, when a terrible certainty came into her mind that he needed help. Around her neck was a chain from which hung a tiny golden whistle. This she raised to her lips and blew a blast upon. At once there flew from the flowers at her feet, a little elf in buttercup yellow, who said:

"What would you, Princess? I am here to obey."

"Quickly, oh, quickly call my godmother," replied the Princess.

Before she could take a step forward, the fairy was at her side.

"My brother is in danger, save him!" cried the Princess Tertia.

The fairy smiled and touched her with her

wand. In an instant she had vanished, but far out on the desert, where the Prince seemed dying of thirst, there arose a tall lily, its cup filled with water, cool, sparkling, crystal-clear. Eagerly he seized the flower, bent his head, and drank every drop the lily held. New life flowed through his veins and he pressed on again, under the broad shadow of the faithful eagle. And in her garden the Princess Tertia stood again, her hands filled with buttercups.

But even shade and drink are not all, and the Prince had eaten nothing since the day before, the robbers having taken what little food he had left. The city of the Princess Irmentrude was in sight. The last rays of the sun were gilding marble walls and porcelain towers, and gleaming upon the golden dome of the palace itself. But the Prince was too weak to reach them.

"Alas!" he cried, stretching out his arms toward that glittering city, "alas! I can go no farther, although the end of my journey is even now in sight."

He covered his face with his hands and stood still, filled with grief.

It was at that moment the Princess Quatra sat

by the brookside, in her father's gardens, with the swaying fern leaves around her casting darker shadows on the green of her gown. Many a time had she sat there with her brother, and as she thought of him, she knew suddenly that he was in danger. Loosening from her throat her pin, an emerald leaf, she dropped it in the stream. A tiny water nixie, in floating garments of mossy green, rose with it, saying:

"What needs the Princess Quatra? Let me be her messenger."

"Go quickly," cried the Princess, "and fetch my godmother here."

The circles in the pool were widening still, when a wee voice said:

"Here am I, Quatra."

"Oh, Godmother," cried the Princess, "my brother suffers! What can'st thou do for him?"

The fairy replied by touching the Princess with her wand, and she vanished from the garden.

Then, out on the desert, as the Prince stood with covered face, despairing, there came a rustling sound new to his ears. He turned, and beheld a pomegranate tree, among whose leaves hung clusters of the ripe crimson fruit.

Thankfully he plucked and ate his fill of them, then lay down on the sands, after one long look at the twinkling lights of the city. As he slept, something dark flew in a window of his father's palace, and a moment later the Princess Dua was fastening again to its chain at her wrist, the little topaz ball. While down by the brook the Princess Quatra clasped at her throat her emerald pin, and hastened to join her sisters.

Part II

Early in the morning the Prince awoke, and set forth on the last of his journey. A few hours' walk brought him to the massive gates of the city.

"Whence come ye?" asked the warder on the wall.

"From the desert," replied the Prince.

"In peace?" questioned the warder.

"Of a surety," answered the Prince.

"Enter then, and partake of the feast with which we celebrate the eighteenth birthday of our beloved Princess Irmentrude."

The Prince started, it was his own birthday and he had forgotten it! What were they thinking of him in his kingdom? Did they even dream of the hardships through which he had passed? He moved slowly along the streets, thinking of his home far away. Could he have known the sorrow in that home, he would have been more saddened. At dawn a caravan from the desert had halted at the gates of his father's city. The chief of its company passed

in seeking the King, and leading by his bridle Pluto, the Prince's horse.

The King, sleepless all the night, had arisen early and was pacing up and down in front of the palace. The sheik approached and fell on his face before him.

"Arise!" commanded the King, "arise, and tell me quickly, whence got ye the steed?"

"Great King," answered the man, humbly, "two nights ago, as we guarded the sleeping caravan far out upon the desert, we spied three robbers hovering near. My band gave chase, captured them, and with them this horse which at once I knew for the Prince's own. Whereupon we slew them, then scoured the plain, but no trace could we find of him, thy son."

The King bowed his head upon the horse's neck. Then he said:

"My son is dead," and turned his face from men.

Great was the grief in the palace. Only the Princesses said:

"He is not dead. Our brother will return," though no one else shared the hope. Yet in the city of the Princess Irmentrude, alive and well, the

Prince was steadily making his way toward his goal.

The streets were full of people, all in holiday attire; houses were garlanded with flowers; balconies were hung with cloth of gold and many-colored silken draperies; booths rose here and there where the feasting had begun; and all the fountains flowed with sparkling wine.

As the Prince passed along, a gay young fellow in hunting-green stepped from a booth and hailed him:

"Thou art a stranger?"

"Yes," replied the Prince, "from across the desert."

"Come then," said the man, "and share the bounty of our Princess. It is free to all."

The Prince followed him to one of the heavy oaken tables laden with good cheer.

"Who art thou?" he asked.

"I am one of our Princess's hunters. I and my merry men have brought in an hundred fat deer for this feast."

"When does the Princess appear?" questioned the Prince.

"Within the space of an hour. When thou hast eaten, we will go forth to meet her."

"Is she as beautiful and wise as rumor saith?"

"She is fairer than the evening star before the moon hath risen, and her wit flashes as the noonday sun upon the gilded domes of her palace," answered the hunter.

"In the far country from which I come, tales are told of the suitors who daily throng her doors. Why does not your Princess wed?" asked the Prince.

"It is because of a spell laid upon her by her fairy godmother. Her heart is locked, and only he who finds the golden key, may hope to marry her."

"Where is this golden key?" eagerly inquired the Prince.

"Nay, that no man knoweth; only the Princess herself. Some say it is buried in the depths of the mountains, where the gnomes keep watch over its hiding place; some think it lies in the bottom of the fathomless sea, where nixies guard it; others believe it hidden in what we call the Tower of the Princess, where our lady loves to sit high above her city; but none knows, save she, where it really is."

"And he who finds it will win the heart of the Princess?"

"Even so; but come, it is time to meet the most beauteous lady in the land."

As he spoke, they heard a blare of trumpets, and far up the street appeared the cavalcade. Ahead rode fifty trumpeters, clad in scarlet and blue, on coal-black steeds with scarlet housings; next came the guards of the Princess, in white and gold, their burnished helmets flashing fire, their splendid white chargers prancing gaily to the music which followed; quaint brazen drums with tightly-stretched lion skin for heads, long silver horns and zithers of tortoise shell, inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

Behind the musicians walked the officers of the Court, clad in rustling silken robes of violet and amber; last of all the Grand Vizier, whose flowing white beard and keen, bright eyes proclaimed his age and wisdom.

Next came she, flower of the kingdom, beloved by all her subjects. A royal white elephant paced proudly between the rows of admiring people; his covering of crimson velvet bore the royal arms in gold; his chains were of silver; his driver, blacker than ebony, carried an ivory goad set with jewels; but within the crimson howdah on his back, sat the most precious jewel of them all, the Princess!

A robe of rich white satin, gold embroidered, clothed her; glossy black hair hung in ringlets far

below her waist; upon her head was her crown of diamonds, while beneath it, her great dark eyes flashed more brightly than its gems. As they caught sight of her, all the people shouted together:

"Long live the Princess Irmentrude!" and fell upon their faces.

All but the Prince. He remained standing, pressing forward for a nearer view of the Princess. As he gazed eagerly upon her, their eyes met and her face flushed, rosily. The guards who followed her sprang upon the Prince and would have slain him, but she waved them back, and stretched out her hand to him in token of pardon.

The cavalcade moved on, the Prince standing as one dazed by such wondrous beauty. Then he turned and followed the procession to the palace. Here, unnoticed in the excitement, he slipped into the rose garden and began to study the Tower of the Princess which overlooked it. It seemed useless to think of climbing its walls; it was exceedingly high with no window except at the very top. Soon the Prince spied a face at this window, and cried out:

"Oh, must I fail now? Can I not reach her yet?"

It was at this time his sister, the Princess Quinta, standing by her window in her gown of blue, sighing for her brother, knew surely, by the quic' b.ting of her heart, he was in trouble. Leaning out, she struck a chime of little bells beneath her window. Up from the forget-me-nots in her garden rose a sprite, who said:

"The Princess calls. Command me and I fly."

"Speed then, and bring my godmother to me."

While the silver chimes still trembled on the air, the fairy appeared before her.

"My brother, the Prince, needs help. Give it him, for my sake."

The fairy waved her wand, and the Princess Quinta disappeared; but as the Prince stood despairing, gazing at the Tower of the Princess Irmentrude, something moved at its base—an ivy vine, climbing fast and faster, making up the side of the smooth, gray wall a ladder of tough, brown stems, covered with glossy green leaves. It stopped just over the window and a moment later, the Prince was making his way up, and soon he had leaped in and stood before the Princess Irmentrude.

"Who art thou, daring stranger, who thus seekest the Princess of this land?" exclaimed she.

Now you must remember that the Prince had traveled over part of the desert on foot. The brambles had torn his clothes; the sharp rocks had cut his shoes; his hair was long and sunburned, and his face was scorched with the desert winds. But he bore himself bravely; his eyes were bright and his voice was clear as he answered:

"I am a wandering Prince who has left his kingdom and braved the terrors of the desert, alone, to find the beautiful Irmentrude."

The Princess did not look displeased as she asked:

"And now you have found her?"

"It is to tell her of my love and implore her to be my wife," replied he, dropping upon his knees.

"Alas!" she said, and the Prince saw again that lovely blush rise to her cheek, "alas, it is not my right to answer you. Only the finder of the golden key of my heart can hope to call me his," and she buried her face in her hands. Her heart was touched, at last.

"Adorable Princess—," began her lover, but she cried hurriedly:

"I hear footsteps. Oh, fly, for even I cannot save you if you are found here!"

Catching her in his arms, the Prince pressed one kiss on her lips, then stepping from the window flew down his vine ladder, which disappeared behind him. Then, in his father's palace, the Princess Quinta stood once more by her chime of silver bells.

Into the Tower of the Princess strode the Grand Vizier.

"Your Royal Highness," he said, "I certainly heard voices."

"You see I am alone," replied the Princess.

"That is true," said the Grand Vizier, much puzzled. He walked to the window and gazed far down the smooth wall into the garden, where he spied a youth walking.

"It is quite true," he repeated, humbly.

"You may withdraw," remarked the Princess, haughtily, and the Grand Vizier bowed himself out of the room.

"But I will attend to that young man," he muttered, crossly, as he left.

So he sent an order to the Grand Chamberlain, who handed it to the First Gentleman of the Court, who passed it on to the Master of Ceremonies, who called an under Secretary, who told a page that the guards must get rid of a stranger who was in the

rose garden. In the meantime the Prince was saying to himself:

"The key, the key! Where is it? How can I find it? Oh, I cannot fail now!"

And his sister, the Princess Sexta, in her dark blue robes, sitting under the cedars in her father's gardens, felt a thrill in her heart and knew her absent brother was in distress. She drew her hand across the strings of her harp, and a pixie flew from the depths of a blue iris growing at her feet.

"Has the Princess a message to send?" he asked. "Let me be the bearer."

"Fly to my godmother," said the Princess, "and call her to my aid."

An instant more, and the fairy alighted at her side.

"How can I help my brother?" hurriedly asked the Princess. "I feel sure he is in trouble."

"In this way," replied the fairy, touching her with her wand.

The Princess dropped her harp, for she felt a change coming over her, and that she was dwindling in size. In another instant, a little brown mouse ran out from under the cedars, through the gardens, and out across the desert like a flash of summer

lightning. Almost within the same moment it had entered the city of the Princess Irmentrude, climbed the high tower, and from a corner of the room watched her with its bright, beady little eyes.

Her Highness sat in the center of the room, quite alone, with a small golden key in her hand.

"Oh, if I could but give it to him," she sighed, "but that is forbidden me," and a tear, brighter than a diamond, gemmed the little key. Then she dropped it in *her pocket*, for that was the hiding-place she alone knew. Her head drooped against the velvet cushions of her chair, her eyes closed and she was deep in thought.

It was then the little mouse crept forth. All silently she climbed the Princess's chair, deftly her sharp teeth nibbled a hole in the Princess's pocket, and swiftly, with the stolen key in her mouth, she flew down the tower wall and dropped it in the pocket of the Prince, just as the guard seized him. Then, under the cedars of her father's garden, the Princess Sexta was stooping to pick up her silver harp.

"Come, Sirrah, out of the Princess's garden!" thundered the guard, as they hustled and buffeted the unfortunate Prince before them.

"What shall we do with him?" asked one.

"Banish him from the city on pain of death," answered the captain of the guard. So they dragged the Prince to the gates and pushed him out into the desert, the massive portals swinging to behind him.

As he stood in the light of the setting sun and gazed out over the sandy plain before him, his heart sank and despair again seized him.

"Alas, this is worst of all! What can I do now?" he cried, with almost breaking heart.

At this moment his youngest sister, the Princess Septa, slipped by the drowsy warders at the gates of her father's city, and stood looking toward the west. She shaded her eyes with her hand from the long level rays of the declining sun, while her violet silken garments fluttered in the evening breeze.

Her heart was with her brother, and a sudden sharp pang warned her of some threatened danger to him. Loosening from her fair braids a silver arrow, she tossed it far into the air. As it fell back into her hands, she perceived astride of it, a tiny creature in violet who said:

"Hast thou commands for me, Princess? I am swift to obey."

"Call quickly my godmother," said the Princess,

and ere she could return the arrow to her hair, the fairy floated down a sunbeam.

"What would my Septa?" she asked.

"My brother needs help. Save him, lest he perish!" cried the Princess. The fairy touched her with her magic wand, and behold! in all the plain one could see no living thing, save a milk-white steed flying upon the wings of the wind into the golden west.

The Prince, standing without the barred gates of the city of the Princess Irmentrude, heard a gentle neighing behind him, and wheeling swiftly, saw there a snowy charger. He mounted quickly and turned his steed toward the east.

How they flew! The sandy desert glided from under them and a long train of sparks, struck out by flying feet, marked their trail. The Prince had taken but three full breaths when he alighted before his father's gate. His fleet steed disappeared, and he fell into the arms of his favorite sister, the Princess Septa.

After their first joyous greetings they turned toward the palace, and Septa asked him:

"Did you find the Princess Irmentrude?"

"Yes," answered the Prince, sadly, "but—," and

just then he carelessly put his hand into his pocket and his fingers closed upon the little golden key! He drew it forth and knew at once it could be nothing save the key to the heart of the Princess.

"But," he continued, triumphantly, "I return in state, to claim her for my bride."

Great were the rejoicings when the Prince appeared in the palace. The sisters looked at each other as though to say:

"We knew he would return."

And the very next day, such a caravan set forth as never before had been seen upon the desert. The swiftest camels laden with tents, supplies for the journey, and gifts for the Princess Irmentrude; horses of the finest breed which bore them rapidly over the sands, King, Queen, Prince, and the seven Princesses, and landed them at the gates of that city which so lately had thrust out the Prince. As the cavalcade halted, the warder appeared, and bowing low, said:

"Whence come ye, noble sirs, and what seek ye?"

"I come to demand the hand of the Princess Irmentrude," answered Prince Alfahdin.

"Alas, that ye cannot have, nor any other," the warder said, sadly.

"What mean ye? Speak!" commanded the Prince, his face paling.

"Only that the golden key to the heart of the Princess is lost, and all the kingdom mourns," replied the warder.

"Nevertheless," said the Prince, the color returning to his face, "I will make my request of the Princess," and the cavalcade passed in at the gates, and moved to the doors of the palace.

When his name and titles had been announced, the Prince and his party entered the great Council Hall where sat the pale Princess, surrounded by her Court. When she looked up and saw the Prince, once more that exquisite rosy flush crept over her face. Then she sighed and looked down.

The King advanced to the throne and formally requested for his son, Prince Alfahdin, the hand of the Princess. The Grand Vizier, who stood at her left, bowed low and answered thus:

"Most August Monarch! In response to your request I must reply that, by an unchangeable law of this kingdom, only he can hope to win the hand of the royal Princess Irmentrude, who holds the golden key of her heart."

The Prince came a step nearer, drew something

from his pocket and laid it in the Princess's lap. She gave a start, a little cry, and then held out both hands to the Prince. The Grand Vizier stooped, picked up a small object which had fallen to the floor, and exclaimed:

"The key!"

You must imagine the wedding which took place the next day, with all the fairies present. The ceremonies were gorgeous beyond description, and during the feast, the seven fairy godmothers recited the adventures of the seven Princesses. The Prince was astonished when he heard how his sisters had so often saved him from danger; the Princesses gave the credit to their fairy godmothers; the gentle Queen rejoiced that she had so well provided for her children; but the King was much humbled, and said:

"Never again will I think fairy godmothers are useless. I will furnish my grandchildren with a half dozen each."

The fairies smiled gently, and said one would be quite enough. Then arose the godmother of the Princess Irmentrude, who was also the Queen of all the fairies, and said:

"Oh, King, give yourself no further uneasiness about your son, the Prince. I will watch over him,

as well as over the Princess. They shall be my especial care; I will guide them by my counsels; happiness shall be theirs; and the blessings of a grateful people shall cause the names of Prince Alfahdin and Princess Irmentrude to live forever in the land."

THE YOUNG DRAGON

HE WAS a very handsome young dragon; at least, so thought his fond parents. He was covered with glittering scales which on his body and wings shaded from blue to green like a peacock's breast. They were golden on his feet and the tips of his wings, while his head glowed like a ruby, his little emerald eyes deep set in it. The effect as he flew about in the sunshine was quite gorgeous.

He lived with his father and mother in the heart of a mountain, the entrance to which was a cave in the side.

Now the young dragon's father was one of the most influential members of the community and the prominent dragons often gathered in his home to talk over the questions of the age. Their most engrossing topic was:

"What shall be our attitude toward man?"

The Conservative dragons contended that it

should be entirely external (the dragon outside of the man), but the young dragon's father, who was the head of the Liberal party, said this was all wrong.

In olden times, he conceded, when knights went about with the avowed intention of slaying dragons, such sentiments were natural (not that he wondered at the knights when dragons so far forgot themselves as to carry off young and edible princesses), but, in these enlightened times, there should be peace between the races. Dragons could be useful to men and, possibly, men might even be of use to dragons.

At this, the members of the Conservative party smiled, derisively.

There were occasions when the discussions grew so heated that the flames poured from the dragons' nostrils. These came out at the top of the mountain and caused the people living near to observe, anxiously.

"The volcano seems very active to-night. I fear we may look for an eruption soon."

The young dragon had been carefully trained by his parents to look upon man as a friend, and was even taught his speech. One evening, as he was strolling alone in the forest, he walked, with the heedlessness of the young, into a trap. It had not

been set for him, but for the Killiowhacs which infested the mountain side. He struggled to escape, but only succeeded in tangling himself more firmly in the ropes of green withes at the bottom of the trap. Here he hung all night, in the most painful position. Early in the morning, however, he perceived a horseman approaching and immediately closed his left eye. This rendered him invisible and he had no wish to frighten the steed of the traveler. Then he accosted him, thus:

"Kind sir, will you be good enough to come to the assistance of a struggling creature?"

The horseman started and looked about him. Seeing no one he asked:

"Who speaks to me?"

"I," said the young dragon. "If you will but tie your horse a little way off, out of sight, I will become visible."

The youth, full of curiosity to discover from whence came the mysterious voice, complied with its request, then advanced toward the trap.

The young dragon opened his left eye and the traveler stopped, suddenly.

"Nay," quoth the dragon, "fear nothing. You see I am quite helpless and in great pain. If you

will take your sword and cut the withes I shall be most grateful." Seeing the youth still hesitated, he continued:

"I will not only be grateful, but will hold myself bound, on the honor of a dragon, to do you service."

The stranger hesitated no longer, but, advancing to the trap, cut with his sharp sword the snare which bound the dragon. As he drew himself painfully out, the young dragon said:

"I am unutterably thankful to you, noble sir. May I ask to whom I owe my life and my freedom?"

"I am Prince Yotun, ruler of this country," replied his deliverer. The young dragon bowed low as he responded:

"Now my service and, indeed, my life are yours, should you need them, to the end of my years, and that is no short term. What is your Royal Highness's age?"

"Twenty years," answered the Prince.

"Ah," remarked the dragon, "I am over eighty, but that is very young, as we dragons usually live to a thousand years. Take this scale," he continued, detaching one from his back, "and whenever you

need my services present it at the cave in yonder mountain side."

"The fire mountain?" said the Prince.

"Oh, do you call it that?" said the young dragon, smiling. The Prince drew back a little; dragons smile very broadly.

After a few more words the Prince mounted his steed and rode away, while the young dragon, whose wings were too bruised to use, limped painfully to his home. Once arrived there, his mother bound up his wounds with an ointment made from the marrow of the Ichthyosaurus, after a recipe which had been in her family for æons, and in a few days he was well again.

It was some time after this that, as the young dragon sat at the mouth of the cave, he saw approaching a horse and rider, and thoughtfully closed his left eye. A nearer view, however, caused him to exclaim:

"The Prince!" and hasten toward him. In his surprise he opened his eye, whereupon the horse reared in terror. The Prince controlled him and the dragon immediately became invisible, apologizing for his thoughtlessness.

"How can I serve your Royal Highness?" he

inquired. The Prince, who was looking haggard and wan, replied:

"My betrothed, the Princess Uralia, has been abducted by the giant Borumgum and carried off to his castle. I am now on my way to rescue her and came to ask if you could render me any assistance."

"Certainly," said the young dragon, "I am proud to do so. If your Highness will remain here I will run and fetch her."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the Prince, "I cannot consent to that. I must myself hasten to her relief at once."

"Oh, very well," said the young dragon, "you go on and I will meet you there." Saying which, he spread his wings and flew away to the giant's castle.

Arrived there he circled around until he espied, at a window in a high tower, a maiden pale with weeping. He flew close to her and said:

"Excuse me, but is this the Princess Uralia?"

The Princess was much surprised at the voice, which apparently came from the air, as the dragon was invisible, but she answered:

"It is indeed the unfortunate Princess Uralia, in the power of that detestable giant Borumgum. But who speaks to me?"

"A friend of the Prince Yotun, who is bound to do him service for service rendered."

"Oh," exclaimed the Princess, who was a quick-witted little thing, "you must be the dragon whose life he saved. You may open your left eye, I shall not be alarmed."

"Now that is sensible," thought the young dragon, as he complied. The sun was shining upon his brilliant scales and the Princess exclaimed:

"What lovely colors you are! I am glad to have seen you." The young dragon was much flattered.

"Get upon my back," said he, moving close to the window, "and I will return you to your father's palace." The Princess obeyed and they started.

In the meantime the Prince Yotun had arrived at the castle gates. He tethered his steed outside and, creeping through a crack, entered the great courtyard where he found the giant Borumgum (who was fifty feet high) standing in front of his door. Advancing toward him the Prince exclaimed, loudly:

"Wretch, instantly restore to me my betrothed, the beautiful Princess Uralia!"

"Eh?" said the giant, surprised, looking all around him.

"Release the Princess Uralia, at once!" shouted

the Prince. Here the giant discovered him and, smiling good-naturedly, said:

"Oh, it's you, is it? Now what do you want?" and, to bring himself a little nearer to the level of the Prince, he sat down upon his doorstep. Once more the Prince angrily repeated his demand for the release of the Princess, but the giant shook his head.

"Couldn't think of it," he said, "she is a very beautiful Princess and I want her to look at. I believe," he added, thoughtfully, "I shall keep her for a mantel ornament."

This made the Prince furious and he drew his sword and slashed at the giant's foot.

"Ouch!" roared the giant as he jumped up, "see here, youngster, don't you know it's rude to stick pins into people?" and he went into his castle in high dudgeon and banged the door after him.

It was useless for the Prince to think of opening it, but while he was debating what to do next, he heard a voice saying:

"If your Highness will climb up on my back I will take you to the palace," and there was the young dragon with the Princess Uralia.

The Prince joyfully embraced his betrothed, then, creeping out through the crack of the great

gate, he untied his steed and turned his head toward home, knowing the good horse could be trusted to find his way to the royal stables. Then he mounted the dragon's back, and as they flew toward the palace of the Princess she told him of her capture by the giant Borumgum and her rescue by the young dragon.

"After I have seen you safely home," said the dragon, "I will collect some of my Conservative friends and we will return and dispose of the giant. He is really getting to be a nuisance."

Arrived at her home, both Princess and Prince lavished thanks upon him, but the young dragon, complacently twirling his moustache, said:

"Do not mention it, your Royal Highnesses. It was really a very little thing, for me."

"At least," said the Princess, unfastening from her neck a long and massive golden chain, "at least, I must beg you to accept this slight token of my gratitude," and she clasped it about his throat.

Blushing with pleasure (and when a red-headed dragon blushes he turns a beautiful heliotrope), the young dragon said he would wear the chain all his life. And he did, although, of course, when he shut his left eye it did not affect the gift of the Princess,

and people were often much surprised to see a heavy golden chain floating through mid-air.

The next day the wedding of Prince Yotun and Princess Uralia was celebrated with great splendor in her father's palace, the young dragon (with his left eye closed) looking on from one of the open windows.

That evening, as he sat alone in front of the cave, he said to himself:

"My father and mother were right; human beings are very interesting and agreeable and—" here the young dragon sighed, gently,—"and fascinating."

He was thinking of the Princess.

"So they sat staring at each other"

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THE RED TROLL

LILLO lay under the big oak tree, sound asleep. Above him in the leafy boughs, two squirrels were chattering, but even if he had been awake, he would not have known they were chattering about him. The gray squirrel peeped down through the leaves and exclaimed:

"What is that curious object down there? Oh, horror, it looks like a BOY!"

The red squirrel drew herself up a little stiffly.

"It certainly is a boy," she said. "It is our Lillo."

"My dear," answered the gray squirrel, with an affected little shiver, "how brave you are. But I could never be so calm with one of the cruel creatures near me."

"Cruel! our Lillo cruel! Why he is the kindest friend we have. He is busy all the autumn gathering nuts to feed us through the winter. Every

morning he spreads them out on that great flat rock you see, which he calls 'the Squirrels' Table.' And there he puts crumbs for the birds, too. Our Lillo cruel? Nonsense!" and the red squirrel stopped, indignant and out of breath. The gray squirrel gave an airy flirt to her bushy tail and replied:

"Oh, very well, my love, if you choose to take the risk. I must be going, though, as I am quite nervous at being so near such a creature. Do go a little way with me until I am well out of danger." The two scampered off into the heart of the forest, and everything was quiet again.

Presently Lillo stirred, then lazily opened his eyes. Such a very curious sight greeted them that he thought he must be dreaming. But no, for when he sat up and opened them to their utmost width, the thing which had startled him remained the same. It was a little man, about a foot high, seated on the edge of the big rock which Lillo called "the Squirrels' Table," his hands clasped around one knee, his foot swinging carelessly. He was clothed all in bright red, from his pointed cap to his tiny pointed shoes, and the gay clothes fitted his thin little body almost as tightly as his skin. His brown face looked like those you sometimes carve from hickory nuts

and, if he had any hair, it must have been the same color. His eyes, like two little black beads, twinkled as he looked at Lillo. The boy's big brown ones were fastened earnestly on him, and so they sat staring at each other.

"Well, well," exclaimed the little man, "why don't you speak? You've a tongue in your head, haven't you?"

"Yes," answered Lillo. "Will you please tell me who you are?"

"Certainly. I'm the Red Troll."

"I've never seen you before. Do you live near here?" asked Lillo.

The troll gave a cackle.

"That's good," he said. "I've lived near here a good many more years than you have, young man. Indeed, I've known you nearly as many years as you've known yourself. And I've heard about you, too. When a boy gathers nuts to feed the squirrels through the cold winter; when he does not forget to strew crumbs for the birds; when he has been seen, in very hot, dry weather, carrying water from the brook to pour around the roots of the violets; why I think it high time I should pay him a visit."

"But I like to do all those things!" said Lillo.

"And I like the boy who does them," cried the troll, jumping lightly from the stone. "How would you like to go home with me now, to return my visit?"

"I should like it very much," answered Lillo, who began to feel that this was going to be an adventure. "Where do you live?"

"Oh, down here," said the troll. "Just lift up this stone," and he waved his hand toward the huge rock upon which he had been sitting.

"That!" said the astonished boy. "Why, I cannot lift that great stone!"

"Ever try?" snapped the troll.

"Why, no, but—"

"Then try now," said the little man.

Obediently Lillo put his hands against the rock and pushed. To his surprise it swung lightly up at his touch, showing underneath a flight of steps. Down these the troll skipped, calling to Lillo to follow. As he did so, the big stone slid noiselessly into place, shutting them out from the daylight and the green earth above.

It was not dark, however, and Lillo looked about him with interest. He stood in a long, narrow passage, its walls hung with soft gray moss, while many

twinkling little lights glowed from the roof. They looked like fairy lamps, burning with a clear, soft flame, and in their light he saw the troll scurrying ahead.

"Come on, come on," he cried impatiently, and Lillo followed.

He led the way into a hall which to the boy seemed only a large room, but the little man turned and looked at him with an air of pride, saying:

"Great, isn't it? You did not expect to find such an immense place as this, did you?"

"No," answered Lillo. "What is it for?"

"We hold our meetings here," said the troll. Seeing the boy did not understand him, he added: "We trolls, and all the gnomes, elves, and wood-sprites who live in and under the forest. There is a great deal of business to be attended to."

Lillo looked about him. The walls were hung with gray moss, like the passage, and there were a number of seats which looked like mushrooms, gathered around a stone platform. At the far end of the room a fire was burning, and he eyed it with curiosity. Presently he went closer, then exclaimed:

"Why, this is not wood burning! It is stone, black shiny stone!"

"No, no," cried the troll, "no wood is burned here. Too many use our beautiful trees for fires, now. But come and see my study." He led him to a tiny room opening from the larger, too small for Lillo to enter. As he looked in he saw that walls and floor were covered with soft, green moss, a mossy couch being the only furniture.

"A study!" he exclaimed, puzzled. "Where are the books?"

"Books!" cried the troll, with contempt in his voice, "I have no books! There would be only other men's thoughts in them. When I have much to decide, I come here alone and study out my own problems. And if more of the people who live on top of the ground did this, the work of the world would be better done. But now come and see my garden."

They passed out of the hall into a large open space, reaching farther than Lillo could see. He looked down, expecting to find flower beds, but only the bare ground stretched before him. A curious sort of ladder made of tree boughs, stood near, and up this the troll was climbing, nimbly. As the boy watched him, he saw that from the roof of this queer garden hung roots of all sorts, large and small, coarse and fine. The little man turned from one to

another, picking off a worm here, straightening out a tangle there, or watering them from a small can he carried. Lillo stared at him, too astonished to speak. The Red Troll looked down and broke into his dry cackle.

"Never saw a garden like this, did you? Ah, you people up above! You are too apt to look only at the surface. Don't you know the under side of things has to be watched and tended or there will be neither bloom nor fruit above? There's a good deal for you to learn, my boy, but I mean to take your education in hand, myself. Hello, there!" he cried suddenly, and running down the ladder, he seized an acorn cup from the wall and clapped it to his ear. The boy had only time to see it was fastened to a long root, when the troll said:

"You are wanted, Lillo. The head-forester's wife is calling you."

"My mother," said Lillo.

"Um-m-m," grunted the troll, but whether he meant yes, or no, it would be hard to say. They were hurrying through the passage when Lillo stopped and asked the troll:

"How did you know my mother wanted me?"

"Oh, I know more than you think," twinkled the

little man. "The birds bring all the news to the squirrels in the oak tree and they let me know, as you just now saw. But here we are. Good-by, Lillo."

"I have had a very pleasant visit, sir," said the boy.

"Have you?" cried the troll. "Why then, come again whenever you like. You will always be able to lift the stone, unless—," and he gave his dry cackle,—"unless I should be away from home. Then, of course, I should lock my front door behind me."

"Thank you," answered Lillo. "I shall be glad to come." He gave a slight push to the great stone which lifted gently, then slid back into place after he was out in the forest. He ran briskly toward his home, calling:

"Coming, mother, coming."

A plump and smiling little woman met him at the door.

"Why, where have you been, son?" she asked. "I have called and called you."

"Oh, mother," he answered, "I have had such a fine time. I have been to visit the Red Troll."

"The Red Troll!" the woman exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes, I have been in his house under 'the Squirrels' Table.'" Then he told her of his adventure. But she only laughed, patting his brown head as she shook her own, and saying:

"You have had a great dream, dear. You must have slept a long time."

He felt surprised that she should not believe him, but grown folks' ways are sometimes hard to understand, and he soon forgot about it.

Now Lillo knew that he was not in truth the child of the good couple who called him son. He had been told the story how, some ten years before, the forester and one of his woodmen had been startled at hearing a child's cry in the depth of the forest. They followed the sound until they came upon a man lying faint and weary on the moss, with a little cold, hungry child sobbing at his side. They took them both to the forester's home, but the man was too weak and ill to speak. When he had been helped to bed, the forester's wife brought him the child, warmed and fed. As the baby hand patted his face, he opened his eyes and murmured:

"Lillo, Lillo, my son—," then closed them in a sleep from which he never wakened. In his cloak they found a letter which they could not read, and

seeing no other way to provide for the child, the good couple took him for their own.

From the first day of his meeting with the troll, Lillo had a new interest in life. Many more visits followed, and always he came home with something to think of. One day, however, he did not find his friend as usual in the hall. He stood a moment waiting for him, when he heard a sound of sobbing. Stepping to the door of the study he looked in. On the couch was stretched, face downward, a tiny man dressed all in green, sobbing out his heart, while the Red Troll bent over him trying to comfort him. He looked up and seeing Lillo, came out into the hall.

"Who is it?" whispered the boy.

"One of the tree-elves," said the troll. "He is in great distress."

"What is the matter?"

"Only the King's order to cut his winter supply of wood," answered the little man, "but it will take many beautiful trees. The elf you saw crying will lose his home, and not only he, but many others."

"Do they live in the trees?" asked Lillo with deep interest.

"Yes, each tree has its elf, and when they are cut down, many mourn."

Lillo sat silent for some time, thinking. Then he asked, eagerly:

"Why doesn't the King burn the black stone as you do?"

"He knows nothing about it," answered the troll, "although his land is full of it."

"Why does no one tell him?" cried the boy.

"No one knows but you," said the troll, looking at him, keenly.

"I? Oh, I am only a boy. Would he believe me, do you think?"

"Go and see," said the Red Troll, gravely. "We can only find out by trying. The gnomes will show you where the stone is to be found, then you shall take some to the King."

It seemed a great thing to Lillo that he should go to see the King. He was almost afraid, but when he thought of the unhappy tree-elves, he made up his mind to try. So soon as he had told the troll this, the little man exclaimed:

"That is right, Lillo. Be willing to help those in distress, at whatever cost to yourself. Come to-morrow and the gnomes will show you where the black stone is found."

The boy did as he was bid, and what curious

creatures he found awaiting him! They were larger than the troll, almost up to Lillo's knee, sturdy fellows with their picks over their shoulders. Silent, too, but the Red Troll, who went also, could talk enough for the whole party.

In a lonely mountain side, not far away, there was a great hole. Into this they crawled and presently found themselves in a passage high enough for a man to stand in, hewn out of the black, shiny stone.

"This leads," said the troll, "to halls and chambers where are stored stones enough to last for a hundred years. These friends of mine, with other gnomes, have dug it from the earth and will be glad to have the King use it for his fires."

Lillo looked at the gnomes, who solemnly nodded their heads. Then one of them filled the bag which hung over his shoulder with large square blocks of stone, and gave it to Lillo.

"You are to take it to the King," explained the troll, "and persuade him to use it and spare the trees."

"I will try," answered the boy.

But he slept little that night, for he was planning how to see the King and speak with him.

However, when a thing should be done, and someone is willing to do it, the way is very apt to open. The next morning a messenger came to tell the head-forester that the King would ride out in his woods that day, and he was to meet him and show him around.

"May I go with you, father?" cried Lillo.

"Yes, indeed. It will be a great chance for you to see the King."

So, with his excitement shining in his eyes, the boy set out with the forester, both dressed in their holiday clothes, to wait under the big oak for the coming of the King. And oh, how fast his heart beat when he heard the horse's feet and saw the party of fine lords and gentlemen riding toward them, the King at their head. The forester took off his cap and bowed very low, and Lillo did the same. After a few words to the man, the King turned his kindly eyes on the boy.

"Your son?" he asked the forester.

"Yes, your Majesty," for he rarely remembered Lillo was not his very own.

"A good son, I hope," smiled the King.

"No man ever had a better, your Majesty," stoutly answered the forester.

"That is well. Now both of you come and show me the trees ready for cutting."

Lillo turned cold with anxiety, but he said nothing and the party moved slowly through the forest. The boy kept very close to the King, sometimes holding back a low bough that it might not strike him, sometimes leading the horse around or over a fallen log, always rewarded by a smile or word of thanks from the rider.

"It seems a great pity to cut down these beautiful trees," sighed the King, half to himself.

"Oh, your Majesty, if only you could spare them!" said the boy, earnestly. The King smiled.

"You must love them," he said, "living among them as you do."

"I do, but it is the poor little tree-elves I am so sorry for," answered Lillo.

"The tree-elves!" exclaimed his Majesty, "Why, what are they?"

"They live in the trees," explained the boy. "Each one has taken care of his own tree since it was a sapling, and oh, if you only could know how they are mourning now, you would never take their homes away from them."

"But I must have wood to keep my palace warm

when the winter comes," answered the King, "so I fear your little elves must lose their trees."

Just then several of the court gentlemen rode up, and Lillo found no opportunity to speak again.

The next morning, with a heavy heart, he started to tell the troll what the King had said. As he stood under the oak tree he heard footsteps and voices of men. Presently a dozen or more appeared, and seeing him, one of them said:

"Have you found anything?"

"No," answered Lillo, surprised at the question.

"Yesterday," said the man, "the King lost his seal with which he seals his state papers. He thinks it may have dropped in the forest, and we have come to search. A large reward is offered for it."

They passed on into the wood and when they were out of sight, the boy lifted the stone and ran down to see the Red Troll. He found the little man in his garden, perched on the top of his ladder, busy with his plants.

"What success, Lillo?" he cried.

"None at all," answered the boy. "I do not think the King believed when I told about the elves, and he said he must have wood to keep his palace warm."

"Yes, I know," nodded the troll. "Whom did you see this morning?"

"Some men who were searching for a seal the King had lost."

"Why not go and find it?" asked the troll.

"I?" said the boy. "I would not know where to look."

The Red Troll sat down on the top of his ladder, folded his arms, and looked at his visitor.

"Lillo," he said, rather severely, "when will you learn to go and do a thing without making objections?"

"Right now," said the boy, laughing. "Tell me what you want me to do."

"Go up to the forest, stand with your back against the oak tree, facing north. Then take one hundred steps straight ahead, and wait."

"Good-by," called Lillo, as he ran out of the garden. He was soon in the wood with his back against the tree. Then he began to move forward, counting his steps. When he reached the hundredth he paused and looked around, but no sign did he see of the King's seal. Then he heard a timid little voice say:

"Are you Lillo?" He looked up to see a tiny

face peeping out from among the leaves overhead.

"Yes," he answered. "The Red Troll sent me."

A little green elf swung himself down and stood on a log at the boy's side.

"We heard you, yesterday, begging the King to spare our trees, and so we have found his seal for you." He laid it in Lillo's hand.

"For me?" cried the boy, in delight.

"Yes. When you take it to the palace, the King will offer you a reward. Then you can tell him about the shiny black stones and show him how they burn. Perhaps then he will spare our homes."

"Oh, if he only will!" cried Lillo. "I will go at once." And thanking the elf, he ran quickly through the wood, not knowing that from every tree a little green man was watching him and hoping for his success.

Stopping at home for his bag of shiny stones, and clutching the precious seal tight in his hand, he set off for the palace. At the great gateway the guard would have stopped him, but Lillo said:

"I want to see the King. I have found his seal," and he opened his hand.

"What luck!" cried the soldiers, as they saw it.

"Here, boy, come with me," said one. "The

King will be glad to see you." And, indeed, he was, when Lillo had been shown into his room and had given him the seal.

"I have offered a very large sum of money for this," said the King, "and it shall be paid to you."

"Your Majesty," said the boy, earnestly, "might I have something else, instead of money?"

The King looked at him in surprise.

"What would you like?" he asked.

Lillo gazed around. There was a fire burning on the hearth, for the palace was rather cold and damp even this bright spring day. He put down the bag and took from it some of the shiny black stones.

"May I put these on the fire?" he said.

"You will put it out," answered the King, "but do as you like."

Lillo laid them on the glowing red coals, while the King watched in silence. Presently they began to burn and crackle, and in a little while were throwing out such a cheerful, ruddy blaze, that the King was delighted.

"It is wonderful," he cried, "wonderful! Where did you get them? Are there more?"

"Oh, yes," answered the boy, "the hillside is

full of them. The Red Troll says the gnomes have enough there to last you a hundred years."

"If I find this to be true, I will double the reward I meant to give you," said the King. Lillo came close to him and looked up into his kind eyes.

"And will you spare the elves' trees!" he asked, eagerly.

"I will," answered the King, "for this stone is far better than any wood. Also, Lillo, I will take you into the palace as one of my pages, and you shall be taught all you will learn."

The King was as good as his word. The trees were spared, the wood-elves rejoiced, and Lillo came to the palace as one of the King's pages. Soon both the King and Queen grew so fond of him, they treated him almost as a son. But he did not forget his friend, the Red Troll, whom he often stopped to see on his way to and from his old home in the forest.

Some years passed happily by, and Lillo was almost grown, when he began to see that the King seemed very sad at times. One day, as they were walking in the garden, the King put his hand on the boy's shoulder and said:

"I wish you were my son, Lillo. I am growing

old and the people urge me to adopt the son of one of my nobles, to succeed me. But I could never love him as I do you. You often remind me of my dear cousin, Prince Harta of Lupino, with whom I played when a lad."

"Where is he now, your Majesty?" asked Lillo.

"We do not know," the King answered, sadly. "He was driven from his kingdom, with his little son, and all trace of them was lost." The King said no more, but the next time Lillo went to see the Red Troll, he asked:

"Do you know what became of the King's cousin, Prince Harta of Lupino?"

The troll sat silent for awhile, then said:

"When you go on to the head-forester's, Lillo, ask his wife for a letter which belonged to your father."

And this Lillo did. As she gave it to him the forester's wife said:

"You should have had this long ago, my dear boy, but I had forgotten it. We could not read it, but I dare say you can."

Although written in a language different from his own, Lillo saw that it was addressed to "King Kara of Lionne," and exclaimed:

"Why this is for our King!"

The forester's wife clasped her hands in distress, crying:

"And we have kept it from him all these years!"

"I must take it to him at once," said Lillo, and he hurried away. He went straight to the King and said:

"Your Majesty, I have something I would like to say to you."

"Say on, dear lad," smiled the King.

Lillo then told how he and his father were found in the forest when he was almost a baby; that his father had not lived, and the head-forester had adopted him. The King listened with interest.

"To-day," said Lillo, "I received this letter which my father left, and find it is addressed to your Majesty."

"To me?" exclaimed the King, astonished. He took it, broke the seal and began to read. He read it once and grew very pale; he read it twice, and tears came to his eyes; he read it the third time, then rose to his feet and put his arms around Lillo.

"My dear boy," he said, in a broken voice, "you are the son of my cousin Harta. You are Prince Lillo of Lupino, and you shall be Prince Lillo of Lionne, and my heir!"

And so it came to pass, as the King said. And when he was gone, on his throne sat King Lillo and reigned over the people of Lionne. Many great lords were his counselors, but to none did he go for advice so often as to his wise friend of old, the little Red Troll.

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